

THE BRITISH LEFT AND IRELAND IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Edited by
Evan Smith and Matthew Worley



The British Left and Ireland in the Twentieth Century

This collection explores how the British left has interacted with the 'Irish question' throughout the twentieth century, the left's expression of solidarity with Irish republicanism and relationships built with Irish political movements.

Throughout the twentieth century, the British left expressed, to varying degrees, solidarity with Irish republicanism and fostered links with republican, nationalist, socialist and labour groups in Ireland. Although this peaked with the Irish Revolution from 1916 to 1923 and during the 'Troubles' in the 1970s–80s, this collection shows that the British left sought to build relationships with their Irish counterparts (in both the North and South) from the Edwardian to Thatcherite period. However these relationships were much more fraught and often reflected an imperial dynamic, which hindered political action at different stages during the century. This collection explores various stages in Irish political history where the British left attempted to engage with what was happening across the Irish Sea.

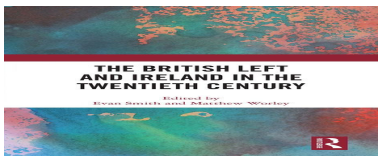
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Introduction: the British left and Ireland in the twentieth century

Evan Smith and Matthew Worley

This collection is dedicated to the history of the British left and Ireland, from the Edwardian era through to the 'Troubles'. The British left has had an enduring, yet uneasy, relationship with their Irish counterparts, as well as the wider Irish republican movement and the 'Irish Question'. As Sam Porter and Denis O'Hearn wrote in the mid-1990s in *New Left Review*, 'British Left attitudes toward Ireland have long troubled Irish socialist republicans'.[1]

The volume contains seven chapters that look at various aspects of this relationship across the twentieth century. It is an expansion of our edited volumes on the history of the British far left, published by Manchester University Press in 2014 and 2017, and a companion to our special issue of *Socialist History Journal* on British Marxist intellectuals since 1956. We are excited to bring together seven chapters that will help develop the scholarship and build our knowledge of the long history that exists between the British left and Ireland, which we briefly explore below.

From the time of the Chartists onwards, there have been connections (but also disconnections) between the British and Irish labour movements, as well as the socialist lefts in both countries.[2] Marx and Engels, according to Chandana Mathur and Dermot Dix, 'took an active interest in the Fenian movement' in the late 1860s and early 1870s, and at different points in time had seen a potential working class revolution in England as the catalyst for social upheaval in Ireland and vice versa.[3] Forming the idea that Ireland

was the ‘weak link’ in British imperialism (an idea that has been carried down through British left thought since), Marx and Engels dedicated significant time in the First International to the ‘Irish question’.[4] Whilst the First International had branches in both Ireland and Britain during the height of the Fenian movement, it gained limited traction within the broader British labour movement, appealing more to the Irish diaspora that existed in Britain at the time.[5]

John Newsinger has argued that ‘Marx seriously underestimated the strength of reformism and nationalism within the British working class’.[6] This led to the British working class and labour organisations being dominated by the English, and the ‘Celtic fringe’ being subordinated to their demands. As James D. Young and Paul Ward have shown, in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, the Marxian left (particularly, the Social Democratic Federation [SDF] and the British Socialist Party [BSP]) was infused with an English nationalism that often rebuffed Irish socialist calls for independence or home rule.[7] The disdain that H.M. Hyndman’s SDF had for Irish independence caused major friction between the SDF and James Connolly’s Irish Socialist Republican Party, which had been established in 1896.[8]

Whilst the British socialist and labour movements were sceptical (in the case of the SDF) or unengaged (in the case of the trade unions) about Irish independence, there was still practical support for Irish trade unions in some instances, such as the Dublin Lockout in 1913. John Newsinger and Ralph Darlington have both argued that the solidarity of the British trade unions, as well as the socialist organisations, such as the BSP, were influential in ensuring the survival of the Dublin workers’ campaign over the nearly 6 month period.[9] Similar to other progressive movements across the global West, the First World War disrupted the growing relationships formed between the British and Irish left. Furthermore, the events of the Easter Rising and the subsequent Irish Revolution irrevocably altered both movements, as well as their interaction with each other.

Since the early 1920s, the communist left in Britain, including its eventual Trotskyist and anti-revisionist sections, have had an oscillating relationship with the left in Ireland and the Irish republican movement. Since the partition of Ireland during the Anglo-Irish War (1919–21), which occurred almost simultaneously with the establishment of the Communist

Party of Great Britain (CPGB), the Party had generally supported the reunification of Ireland and, since 1969, had supported the call for the removal of Britain's military and political presence in Northern Ireland. This support for a free and united Ireland stemmed from the position of the Communist International in support of the national liberation struggles of all colonial and semi-colonial people across the globe, and from the Leninist assumption that revolutions in the colonial sphere would help spark revolutions in the West. Specifically for the British working class, Lenin argued in 1914 that '[t]he English working class will never be free until Ireland is freed from the English yoke'.[10]

The CPGB had a substantial Irish membership and close links with the communist movement in Ireland. Although this was, at times, a strained relationship, with the Irish Communists often feeling that their sister party overshadowed them. Nevertheless, the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI), at the behest of Moscow, had often to defer to the CPGB's leadership. With the Irish Communists going through several different organisations in the inter-war period (most prominently, the Irish Workers League between 1923 and 1933), the CPI was reconstituted in 1933 after previously existing for 3 years between 1920 and 1923. The new CPI had been 'Bolshevised' but still wavered between advocating a broad anti-colonialist front against the British and a more united front against the British and 'their Irish agents, Cosgrave [and] De Valera'.[11] The CPI and its previous incarnations had attempted to win over left-leaning republicans from Saor Éire and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) (although dual membership had been banned until 1933), but the IRA was deeply divided over left-wing republicanism as evidenced at its 1934 conference.[12] In response to this, the CPGB, in the journal *Labour Monthly*, criticised the 'petty-bourgeois leadership' of the IRA as 'unwilling to conduct a fight' against the De Valera government.[13] However, the British party recognised the IRA as part of a broad anti-fascist Popular Front during the late 1930s; particularly, as a number of former IRA men went to fight in the Spanish Civil War.[14]

The Connolly Club, later renamed the Connolly Association (CA), was established in 1938 by Irish socialists in Britain. It aimed to promote the interests of Irish workers within the British labour movement, as well as the reunification of Ireland. One of its leading figures was CPGB member and historian, C. Desmond Greaves. Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen and Andrew

Flinn have written that the CA provided 'a vehicle for socialist republicanism under communist direction, but without any suggestion of rivalry with established communist party structures'.[15] Publishing the monthly newspaper, *Irish Freedom* (renamed the *Irish Democrat* in 1945), the CA had a more symbiotic relationship with the republican movement in Ireland and the IRA via the trade unions. Although individual CA (and CPGB) members had links to the IRA, particularly through the Wolfe Tone Society,[16] the only two organisations that the CA affiliated with were two organisations that the CPGB had links to, the National Council for Civil Liberties and the Movement for Colonial Freedom.[17]

The CPGB saw the establishment of the Republic of Ireland in 1949 as part of the wave of decolonisation occurring across the world in the post-war period and proclaimed that British rule in Northern Ireland was a form of neo-colonialism that needed to be challenged by the Northern Irish population (especially, the labour movement). The CPGB, as the Communist Party at the metropole of the largest empire at that time, was dedicated to anti-colonialism and fostering links with anti-colonial movements across the Empire. Unlike its support for the insurgent national liberation movements that emerged in other British colonies in Asia and Africa, the CPGB chose to support the united Irish labour movement, rather than the more militarised republican movement embodied by Sinn Féin and the IRA. Its sister party, the CPI, had split during the Second World War (due to Irish neutrality) with the party dissolving itself in the Irish Free State in 1941 and the party renaming itself in the Six Counties as the Communist Party of Northern Ireland (CPNI). After its wartime dissolution, the CPI emerged again in Ireland as the Irish Workers League (IWL) in 1948, then the Irish Workers Party (IWP) in 1962 (the CPNI and IWP finally reunited as the CPI in 1970).

Despite the military presence of the British in Northern Ireland, the CPGB viewed the socio-political conditions of Ireland as similar to Britain and believed in focusing on developing the strength of the labour movement to gain political power, rather than armed rebellion, which was happening elsewhere in the British Empire. The Party called for the remaining British troops stationed in the North to be removed, but believed that this could be done peacefully. Supporting the push for civil rights for the Catholic population in Northern Ireland, as well as an end to the 'police state' present in the North, the Party was sympathetic to the Northern Ireland

Civil Rights Association, which included people from the CPNI and the Wolfe Tone Society, a republican group with links to Sinn Fein.

The relationship with Sinn Féin and the IRA, despite links between them, the Wolfe Tone Society and the CA, was much more fractious for most of the 1960s. In a bulletin published by the CPGB's International Department in 1968, the Party wrote that Sinn Féin's *United Irishman* newspaper 'increasingly reflects the interests of [the] petit-bourgeoisie and small independent capitalists', but welcomed the leftwards turn that Sinn Féin had taken in the mid-1960s.[18] Even the CA asserted in July 1966 that it favoured 'the political strength of the working class movement' to the 'power of the gun' proposed by Seamus Costello,[19] at that time a leading figure in the IRA.

The outbreak of the conflict in 1968 and the arrival of British troops in Derry in 1969 changed the outlook of the British left towards what was happening in Northern Ireland and the wider 'Irish Question'. The CPGB continued to call for a mass movement to fight for civil rights in the North and against the British presence in the statelet, whilst some Trotskyist groups, such as the International Marxist Group (IMG) and the International Socialists (after 1976, Socialist Workers Party), 'critically' supported the Provisional IRA after the split within the Irish republican movement in 1969–70. Similar to many other social movements that the CPGB was involved in, the Party had been at the forefront of building solidarity between the British and Irish labour movements for the purpose of a reunited Ireland, but was slowly overtaken by more radical groups in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s.

The beginning of the conflict in Northern Ireland coincided with the explosion of the far left in Britain, with the radicalism of 1968 seeing the emergence of the IMG and the International Socialists. For many on the left in Britain, the landing of British troops in Derry in August 1969 following the outbreak of violence was initially understood as a bulwark against the sectarian violence of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the paramilitary police organisation known as the 'B Specials'. It was believed that this intervention would be merely a temporary measure, and that the deepening of the crisis of Northern Ireland would give rise to opportunities for the left to exploit.

This view soon shifted as the British military presence came to be seen as an imperialist and invading force, linked to reinforcing the Unionist-

dominated Stormont parliament and the structures of the loyalist state. The rising stature of the (Provisional) IRA after 1970 as the vanguard of resistance against the British occupation split the British left. Militant argued that the IRA's terror campaign against the British was adventurist and counter-productive.[20] In a special issue of *The Militant* dedicated to the situation in Northern Ireland, Brian Kinkead criticised the tactics of the IRA as 'indifference to the working class as a whole' that provoked sectarian violence, with the long-term goal of 'mak[ing] the stay of the British Army so expensive that the British Government would be forced to withdraw it'.[21] 'Instead of overthrowing British imperialism through the use of political and industrial activities of the working class', Kinkead wrote, 'the [IRA] leadership are attempting to overthrow it militarily'.[22]

Both the CPGB (via the CPI) and the International Socialists held the view that the leadership of the IRA within the republican movement signified a failure of the left to convince the working class in Northern Ireland of a socialist solution to the conflict. For example, in 1973, the CPGB's *Marxism Today* ran an article by Tom Redmond from the Communist Party of Ireland, which argued, 'Wherever working class leadership is absent the tactics, strategies and content adopted are those of the middle class'.[23] Initially, the most supportive group in Britain towards the IRA (both the Provisional and Official wings) was the IMG, which had political reservations about the IRA's programme, but defended the organisation as an anti-imperialist force engaged in a guerrilla war with the British.

The anti-criminalisation and anti-H-Block campaigns of the late 1970s and early 1980s re-galvanised support for the Irish republican movement in Britain, including amongst the British left, particularly as the Thatcher government took a hardline stance against making any concessions to the prisoners. However, the various groups on the British left were divided over their attitude towards the hunger strikers in 1980 and 1981. Whilst the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and IMG supported the hunger strikers, Militant, in contrast, was more apprehensive in their approach, explicitly stating that their support was on 'the basis of humanitarian grounds and not particular support for the IRA'..[24]

On the other end of the spectrum were the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG) and the Revolutionary Communist Tendency (RCT) (which

later became the Revolutionary Communist Party [RCP] after 1981). Both differentiated themselves from the rest of the left by its uncritical support for the IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).[25] A special section of the RCG's newspaper *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* was dedicated to the RCG's campaign, Hands off Ireland!, which heavily featured the prisons struggle, with the newspaper also employing a special prisons correspondent. Meanwhile, the RCT/RCP was particularly critical of any left-wing condemnation of the IRA's violent campaign, declaring, 'The left is ready to denounce the violence of the oppressed—especially when it is conducted in the heartlands of the oppressor, in Britain itself'.[26] At the time of the anti-H-block campaigns, the RCT had launched the Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act campaign. This transformed into the Irish Freedom Movement in 1982, which was a constant campaign throughout the 1980s by the RCP.

Following on from the RCG and RCT/RCP, Red Action, a group that had formed out of the anti-fascist 'squaddists' of the SWP in the early 1980s,[27] became involved in actions with the IRA, which saw two Red Action members jailed for their Irish republican related activities in the early 1990s.[28] Paul Stott has written, 'This ability to commit practically, rather than merely rhetorically to the republican cause, is exceptional on the British left'.[29]

Nonetheless, most of the British left recognised that the Irish republican movement had been revitalised on both sides of the Irish Sea by the anti-criminalisation campaigns and that by the mid-1980s, a grassroots political mass movement had emerged which seemed to offer an alternative to the armed conflict promoted by the IRA and the INLA. Besides the RCT/RCP and RCG, the British left preferred the path of the mass political movement rather than the IRA's violent strategy, looking at the anti-criminalisation campaign as a way forward. However, the British left also had to accept that although alternative sites of republicanism had been built during the 1980s, the militarism of the IRA still dominated the republican movement.

Porter and O'Hearn bemoaned in 1995 that whilst there were 'honorable exceptions among the British Left', 'their voices have too often been stifled by a consensus of indifference at best and reaction at worst'.[30] Their specific criticism came in the wake of the IRA's 1994 ceasefire, which was supported by the majority of left groups in Britain. For Porter and O'Hearn,

the British left's support for the 'peace process' had allowed 'sectarian unionism' to prevail in any power-sharing arrangement.[31] A similar criticism was made by the SWP in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement and the subsequent referendums held in 1998. The Socialist Party (formerly Militant) critically supported the Good Friday Agreement, hoping that the situation would 'see the re-emergence of class politics' and 'class unity between Catholics and Protestants'.[32] The Communist Party of Britain, the predominant successor to the CPGB, also supported the Agreement, calling for disarmament by all groups (including the state) and the eventual withdrawal of British troops, but at the same time argued that 'Britain has a special responsibility to ensure a democratic solution in northern Ireland [*sic*]'.[33]

In recent years, there has an expansion of scholarship looking at the relationship between the British left and labour movement, their comrades in Ireland and the Irish republicanism. Geoffrey Bell's *Hesitant Comrades* analysed the response of the British labour movement to the events in Ireland between 1916 and 1923, describing this hesitancy as one 'by most of the British labour movement to devote time, energy and intellectual endeavour to explore what was happening in Ireland in those years'.[34] Bell shows that in the years prior to the formation of the CPGB and the solidification of the Labour Party—from the 1880s to the 1910s—the labour and socialist movements in Britain were much more diffuse and when the push for Irish Home Rule transformed into the Irish Revolution, many of the British left at the time were caught out by events across the Irish Sea.

Laurence Marley has published an edited collection on the British Labour Party and Ireland across the long twentieth century, starting with the twin rise of Irish nationalism and the British Labour Party in the late nineteenth century and ending with Tony Blair's dealings with Northern Ireland during his Prime Ministership from the Good Friday Agreement to Stormont's power-sharing arrangement in the 2000s.[35] Although the main focus of Marley's collection is the Labour Party, the far left is discussed by Stephen Howe and John Cunningham, with their chapters on the socialist

left intelligentsia on Ireland and the Militant Tendency's perspective on Ireland, respectively.[36]

The edited collection *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain* by Graham Dawson, Jo Dover and Stephen Hopkins has several chapters that touch on the labour movement and the left, including Aly Renwick's chapter on the Troops Out Movement (TOM) and the chapters by Ann Rossiter and Di Parkin looking at solidarity campaigns by feminist activists in the 1970s and 1980s.[37] Although Renwick discusses how the TOM emerged out of the radicalism of the late 1960s, especially the anti-Vietnam War movement, he does not name the various leftist groups that played a significant role in the TOM, such as the IMG and the Communist Party. The women's liberation groups that Rossiter discusses crossed over greatly with the socialist left, albeit with significant differences, and the feminist activism looked at by Parkin also had its roots in the labour movement. Despite these common activist circles, the British left is not a theme drawn out in these chapters.

More emerging research on the commonalities between the British left and Irish republicanism have been explored by scholars such as Patrick Smylie, who has examined the links between the CPGB and Irish republicans via the CA.[38] Furthermore, the work of Matt Treacy and Gerard Noonan on the history of the IRA prior to the 'Troubles' have dealt with the links between left Irish republicans and the Communist Parties in both Ireland and Britain, but have predominantly focused on how these links led to internal debate within the IRA.[39]

As part of our edited volume *Waiting for the Revolution: The British Far Left from 1956*, Daniel Finn provided an overview of the British left and Northern Ireland during the 'Troubles', arguing that the left in Britain (and their sister organisations in Ireland) played a role in the various civil rights and anti-criminalisation campaigns, but was 'unable to shift the Labour Party away from its support for the "bi-partisan" consensus on Northern Ireland'.[40] This volume seeks to expand upon Finn's work and look at different episodes in the history of the relationship between the British left and Ireland across the twentieth century.

The first article, 'Divided Sisterhood? Nationalist Feminism and Militancy in England and Ireland', by Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, explores the relationship between militant feminists in England and Ireland in the early

twentieth century. As Crozier-De Rosa explains, the militant suffragist movements in both countries were part of the left and interacted with the various left groups of the period, albeit whilst maintaining separate organisations to promote the suffragette movement. Similar to the relationships between English and Irish socialists in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, a divide occurred between these feminists over the conflicting aims of Irish and English nationalism. Crozier-De Rosa argues that this divide between Irish and English suffragettes can be seen as a precursor to the split in 1914 between pro-war and anti-war suffragettes in England.

Following is David Convery's article, '"As Imperialistic as our Masters"? Relations Between British and Irish Communists, 1920–1941′, which analyses the relationship between the CPGB and their Irish counterparts, the Communist Party of Ireland (in both guises), the Revolutionary Workers' Groups, and the IWL. Similar to the manner in which the CPGB treated other Communist Parties in the British Empire, the British party often took on a paternalistic tone in its communications with the Irish communists. The Comintern encouraged the CPGB to take a keen interest in the political situation in Ireland in the post-revolutionary period, but the political line proposed by Moscow wavered between a focus on the CPGB and the Irish communists.

The fourth article is Gerard Madden's 'The Connolly Association, the Catholic Church, and anti-communism in Britain and Ireland during the early Cold War'. Madden looks at the CA in the early years of the Cold War and how Catholic anti-communists in both Britain and Ireland expressed concern about the CA's twinning of communism and Irish republicanism. The article demonstrates how Catholic-based anti-communism both took on a transnational nature in the early decades of the Cold War, but also had a more localised focus on the CA as a particularly subversive organisation amongst the Irish diaspora in Britain, especially amongst the labour movement.

Following Madden's analysis of anti-communism in the Republic of Ireland, Stephen Goss' article 'Two Flags in the Sand: Anti-communism in early Cold War Northern Ireland' looks at similar processes north of the border. Goss demonstrates that both Protestant and Catholic political and religious figures in Northern Ireland pursued an anti-communist agenda in the late 1940s and early 1950s and used their duelling anti-communisms in

their broader campaigns for unionism and nationalism, respectively. The leftwards shift in Britain after the Second World War represented by the incoming Labour government, a revitalised Communist Party and a more combative trade union movement worried Protestant and Catholic leader in Northern Ireland and many were mobilised against similar occurring across the Irish Sea.

Finally, Marc Mulholland examines the era of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland and the first decade of the 'Troubles' in his article, 'Northern Ireland and the Far Left, c.1965–1975′. Although the dominant force in Irish republican politics was Sinn Féin and the IRA throughout the 'Troubles', Mulholland argues that the period did present opportunities for the far left in both Ireland and Britain. Mulholland points to the relative success of People's Democracy in developing a socialist and republican programme and its efforts to build a mass movement in Northern Ireland. He also outlines the efforts of the various far left groups in Britain to come to terms with the situation in Northern Ireland in a 'revolutionary' period, which, in the long term, were not successful in converting the early enthusiasm into tangible gains.

The aim of our broader work on the British left has been to bring the histories of these organisations, activists and movements to a wider audience and encourage new scholarship on these often overlooked areas of contemporary British history. With this volume of *Contemporary British History*, we are looking to explore how the British left interacted with their sister organisations in Ireland and the broader Irish republican movement and how it addressed the issue of the 'Irish Question' during the twentieth century. The articles in this issue build on these new developments in British left history and expand on them, taking international and transnational perspectives to examine the long relationship between the lefts in Britain and Ireland. As with our works on the British left, we hope that these articles inspire further research into these areas, and with resources such as the Irish Left Archive[41] digitising more primary documents from the left in both Britain and Ireland on the subjects of Irish republicanism and the 'Troubles', it seems as though many new resources are becoming available to scholars to help tell these stories.

Notes

1. Porter and O'Hearn, "New Left Podsnappery," 131.
2. Reaney, "Irish Chartists in Britain and Ireland," 94–103. For a discussion of British labour movement and Ireland leading up to the Chartists, see: Thompson, "Ireland and the Irish in English Radicalism," 120–151.
3. Mathur and Dix, "The Irish Question in Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels's," 103–105.
4. Rodden, "The Lever Must Be Applied in Ireland", 609–640.
5. Boyle, "Ireland and the First International," 44–62.
6. Newsinger, "A Great Blow Must Be Struck in Ireland", 165.
7. Young, "A Very English Socialism and the Celtic Fringe 1880–1991," 136–152; Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*.
8. Howell, *A Lost Left*, 42–52; Young, "A Very English Socialism and the Celtic Fringe 1880–1991," 149–150.
9. Darlington, "British Labour Movement Solidarity," 504–525.
10. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination."
11. Letter of Anglo-American Secretariat to Ireland RE: elections (7 January, 1932), Comintern Archives, RGASPI 495/89/75/1.
12. See: Richard English, "Socialism and Republican Schism in Ireland," 48–65.
13. Shields, "The Republican Congress and Ireland's Fight," 687.
14. Convery, "Revolutionary Internationalists," 131–144.
15. Morgan, Cohen and Flinn, *Communists and British Society 1920–1991*, 201.
16. Sheehy, "In the Shadow of Gunmen."
17. Connolly Association, *What is the Connolly Association?*, 14.
18. CPGB International Department, *International Affairs Bulletin*, 8.
19. 'Force or Agreement?', *Irish Democrat* (July 1966) 3.
20. Cunningham, "The Militant Tendency Comes to Ireland."
21. Kinkead, "Provisional IRA Strategy Will Not Defeat Imperialism," 2.
22. Ibid.
23. Redmond, "The Forces in the Irish National Liberation Struggle," 169–170.
24. Militant, *Internal Bulletin* (March 1981), 6–7.
25. Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 145.
26. RCT, *Ireland's Victory Means Britain's Defeat*, 17.
27. See: Birchall, *Beating the Fascists*, 87–92.
28. Hayes, "Red Action—Left Wing Political Pariah", 242–243.
29. Stott, "For Every Action There is an Equal and Opposite Reaction," 106.
30. Porter & O'Hearn, "New Left Podsnappery," 132.
31. Ibid., 147.
32. Taaffe, *From Militant to the Socialist Party*, 303.
33. CPB, *Britain's Road to Socialism* (2001) https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/brs/2001/04.htm (accessed 11 July, 2018).
34. Bell, *Hesitant Comrades*, 216.
35. Marley, *The British Labour Party and Twentieth-Century Ireland.*
36. Howe, "Some Intellectual Origins of the Labour Left's Thought," 182–196; Cunningham, "The Militant Tendency Comes to Ireland," 197–215.
37. Renwick, "Something in the Air," 111–126; Rossiter, "Not Our Cup of Tea," 153–168; Parkin, "Political Delegations of Women," 169–179.
38. Smylie, "The CPGB, the Connolly Association and Irish Communism," 639–655.
39. Treacy, *The IRA 1956–69*; Noonan, *The IRA in Britain 1919–1923*.
40. Finn, "The British Radical Left and Northern Ireland," 214–215.
41. Irish Left Archive is available at https://www.clririshleftarchive.org.

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Divided sisterhood? Nationalist feminism and feminist militancy in England and Ireland

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa

ABSTRACT
The generally accepted story is that British militant suffragists performed an unexpected and abrupt move away from the feminist movement and towards a fiercely jingoistic nationalist campaign once the war began in 1914. Yet, given the nature of exchanges between Irish and British militant feminists, Irish feminists should not have been surprised by this turn from gender solidarity to English nationalism. In this article, I argue that Irish-British militant feminist entanglements worked to expose the powerful role that English nationalism played in suffrage politics at a time when nearly all the focus was on the disruptive influence of Irish nationalism.

Introduction

In July 1912, three English militant suffragists – Mary Leigh, Gladys Evans and Lizzie Baker (Jennie Baines) – travelled to Ireland where, in what is now a renowned display of suffragette[1] activism, they threw a small hatchet at Herbert Asquith, visiting British prime minister, and John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, who were meeting to discuss the issue of Irish Home Rule. Later, they also set fire to Dublin's Theatre Royal where Asquith was due to speak. The three women were arrested, tried and accorded heavy sentences for their militancy – five years penal servitude in Leigh's and Evans's cases – before undergoing the strains of a hunger strike and the brutality of force feeding while incarcerated in Ireland. The women were members of the British organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), and they had not consulted Dublin-based militant suffragists, members of the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), before undertaking either action. Members of the IWFL, far from

condoning the actions of Leigh, Evans and Baines, were angered and frustrated that members of the British organisation had conducted a brief violent campaign in Ireland without considering either the volatility of nationalist and Unionist relations there or the leanings and strategic outlook of Irish suffragists, who were, like Irish men, divided along nationalist and Unionist lines with the result that the Irish suffrage movement was highly fractured. The actions of English militants in Ireland only served to exacerbate anti-suffragist sensibilities on the island as the Irish suffrage movement came to be tainted by its supposed collusion with a British militant feminist movement that was becoming increasingly opposed to Irish nationalist aspirations. The decision made by the English women to ignore Irish women while carrying out suffrage militancy in Ireland also had the effect of exacerbating what was already an uneasy alliance between Irish suffrage militants and their British counterparts.

Irish and British suffragists were allied in many ways. Indeed, to observers at the time, it surely seemed that both campaigns were inextricably linked. Both movements were, of course, embedded within the left-wing political cultures of their respective countries. The WSPU grew out of the British labour movement: its founders, although mainly middle-class, were all members of the Manchester branch of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), and socialist leader and Labour Member of Parliament, Keir Hardie, had even raised £300 to help the suffrage organisation establish itself.[2] On the Irish side, the IWFL was located at the radical end of the left-wing spectrum, advocating, as it did, not only radical feminism but also increasingly a radical anti-colonial strain of Irish nationalism that was at odds with the ideas of the more moderate Home Rule nationalists. Women on both sides of the Irish Sea were further connected by the fact that they were ruled by the same male British parliament over which they had no control. Their desire to empower women through enfranchising them made them part of the same network of suffrage activists. English and Irish women referenced each other's campaigns, exchanged funding, ideas and approaches, and travelled across national spaces. Those who shared a commitment to using militant tactics were also arrested and imprisoned across those various national spaces.[3] Both groups of women acknowledged the role that Irish nationalist politics had and was continuing to play in their cross-border feminist campaigns. Irish and British suffrage militants admitted that they had modelled their methods on the politically aggressive

and often violent actions of successive waves of Irish nationalist politicians. Increasingly, they each referenced the intensifying militancy of the nationalist and Unionist movements in Ireland in order to legitimise their own forceful and disruptive techniques. As the 1910s progressed, both Irish and British feminists became highly sensitive to the obstructive role that Irish nationalist politics was playing in suffrage politics; negotiations over Irish Home Rule had led the Irish Parliamentary Party, which held the balance of power in the Westminster parliament, to block the passing of the 1912 Conciliation Bill which would have enfranchised eligible women across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (UK), for example. There is little doubt, then, that on the basis of these forged connections and because of what they saw as Irish men's undue influence in feminist politics, women of the British WSPU felt that they had every right to perform militancy in the Irish capital – whatever the objections of Irish nationalist feminists at the time.

In 1995, pioneering historian of Irish nationalist feminism, Margaret Ward, published an article on the conflicting interests of the Irish and British feminist movements.[4] Her argument was that the WSPU took a pro-British stance not only on the Irish Question but also on the issue of suffragism that had dire consequences for the Irish suffrage movement. Since then, a number of other scholars have followed by examining the British and Irish movements within the same analytical framework. Louise Ryan has called for more attention to the role of British imperialism in Irish feminist affairs, commenting that the Irish movement had more in common with that in India and the Philippines than with those of other European sites who were not engaged in anti-colonial campaigns.[5] More recently Ian Christopher Fletcher has outlined the similarities and differences in various British suffrage organisations' approaches to the issue of politics on the so-called Celtic fringes.[6]

In this paper, I expand on the work of Ward, Ryan and Fletcher by extending the argument that political expediency informed the approach taken by the British WSPU towards Irish feminist politics. I argue that it was nationalist ideology, centred on a notion of Englishness, which directed the wider political priorities of the WSPU and which had a commanding hand in shaping suffrage politics in the United Kingdom. A pervasive sense of Englishness had enabled the leaders of the WSPU, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, to construct a fantasy nation – drawing here on the

theories of Ghassan Hage[7] – that defined the United Kingdom as a multi-cultural and multi-racial entity where the more knowing, mature, rational and superior Anglo-Saxon or English core tolerated and led the more emotional, irrational, childlike and inferior Celtic peripheries. Constructing their fantasy nation in this way enabled English suffrage leaders, like the Pankhursts, to promote the idea of a UK-based transnational feminist solidarity across the 'four nations', while actively denying the legitimacy of separate nationalisms within that 'multi-national' construct. However, by repeatedly asserting that their movement was distinctively Irish and not simply a branch of the more dominant English campaign, Irish suffrage militants, led by staunch nationalists like Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Margaret Cousins, worked to deny English militant suffragists' construction of the tolerant, inclusive but superior English feminist. Far from ignoring or eclipsing the importance of the national within the transnational, as English nationalist feminists had done – and while acknowledging the imbalance of power existing between suffragists in the British metropole and those in the Celtic peripheries – Irish nationalist feminists stressed that their entanglements with English militants were transnational in actuality as they crossed national boundaries that were or should have been in place and respected. Such an interpretation of the unequal status of feminists within the various colonial and imperial contexts of the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century is intended to open up discussions about the powerful role that English nationalism played in suffrage politics at a time when nearly all of the focus was on the seemingly disruptive influence of Irish nationalism.

Nationalism and transnational feminism in the United Kingdom

Historians of empire and those studying women's history have long had cause to embrace transnational approaches to the past; that is, studying the movements and exchanges across national and colonial borders.[8] Empire by its very nature operates across multiple and dispersed sites or nations. Participants in women's movements, although often grounded in their national context, have also tended to connect with ideas and activists internationally.[9] Scholars of feminist activism within a colonial or imperial paradigm have multiple reasons for examining the circulation of peoples,

goods and ideas between and across national and colonial sites. Those examining the lives of colonial women have the opportunity of using transnational methodologies to challenge traditional or conservative notions of metropolitan-colonial relationships by highlighting the value of ideas flowing from the so-called 'margins' into the 'centre'; and many have done so.[10] Re-evaluating the flow of ideas between imperial and colonial sites is not without its challenges. Scholars of feminisms in the Americas, like Maylei Blackwell, have warned against adding to the inequalities suffered by certain groups of women by ignoring their distinctive contexts and conditions – geopolitical, colonial, racial, economic and sexual – and instead concentrating on the linkages formed by the 'Sisterhood is global' approach.[11] It is this wariness of overlooking diversity and the differences of the local or the national that directs my examination of the relationship between British and Irish militant suffragists.

Transnational approaches to the study of different but connected feminisms have appropriately been applied to histories of the British Empire. The Empire connected multiple sites, nearly all of which were experiencing some form of feminist agitation in the late nineteenth century and early to mid-twentieth century while also negotiating colonial-national identities (this is certainly true for colonies like Australia, India and Canada). However, examining the usefulness of a transnational approach to the study of women's movements also has important implications for the history of Britain's 'internal' empire, namely, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, established with the 1800 Act of Union.[12] The question of whether or not Ireland was a colonial possession or an equal and willing partner in the United Kingdom is one that is still debated within Irish historiography.[13] Certainly, the late twentieth-century conflict, the Troubles, in Northern Ireland rendered this question a vital one given nationalist paramilitaries' insistence that they were fighting an anti-imperial war.[14] At the beginning of the twentieth century, nationalist feminists – through, for example, the IWFL – undoubtedly framed their two-fold activism, gendered and national, as a monumental struggle against a dominant colonial power, thereby adding to what was an already fractured suffrage movement.[15]

However, the colonial dimension of the Irish situation was not accepted by the IWFL's militant sisters in England. Members of the WSPU repeatedly asserted that the United Kingdom was a well-balanced blend of

'races', namely Anglo-Saxons in the core and Celts around the peripheries. This multi-racial or multi-cultural[16] nation was ruled over by one imperial parliament, operating out of the British imperial centre, in London. The WSPU recognised that the Irish had a right to be unhappy with the way in which the imperial parliament had administered Irish affairs. The British centre had unjustly used coercion in Ireland in order to subdue the discontent of the Irish population. However, that tradition of injustice could now be set to right with the establishment of a local parliament that could exercise a degree of autonomy with regards to local or regional affairs, while still being subject to the rulings of the more important imperial parliament (Home Rule). The separatist, anti-colonial and anti-British policies of later strands of popular Irish nationalism were not to be tolerated for that was not in keeping with English nationalism which was at the centre of the WSPU's feminist ideology. (The Pankhursts, for example, prioritised nationalism over internationalism as demonstrated by their later assertion in their paper, *Britannia*, 'Internationalism is based upon Nationalism and without Nationalism it is impossible'.)[17] As Anne McClintock has clarified, feminism and nationalism are not transhistorical phenomena for they each have a history.[18] Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, the WSPU espoused a particular blend of English nationalist feminism peculiar to its time and context that directed its interactions with Irish militant suffragists.

A substantial body of literature now exists on how feminism and nationalism variously merged and clashed within the early-twentieth-century Irish context, but relatively little has been published that extrapolates just how far those often competing ideologies meshed in the English centre. For the most part, scholarly emphasis has been on how imperialism – connected to but also distinct from English nationalism – directed the reactions of many towards feminism within the British metropole; certainly the reactions of anti-suffragists.[19] Numerous scholars have commented on the international dimension of English national identity; its inextricable ties to imperialism. Catherine Hall writes that Empire provided 'a frame for England itself, a way of knowing what it was to be English'.[20] Krishan Kumar, Shula Marks and Bernard Porter likewise assert that English nationalism centred on the idea that the English were at the head of a vast imperial network that brought civilisation, progress and

modernity to far-flung corners of the globe.[21] Robert Young argues, therefore, that Englishness was defined 'less as a set of internal cultural characteristics attached to a particular place, than as a transportable set of values which could be transplanted, translated and recreated anywhere on the globe'.[22] Thus London was not seen simply as 'the capital of England, nor of Great Britain, nor even of the Empire, but of the whole Anglo-Saxon world'.[23]

England's 'internal' empire too was predicated on a racial hierarchy in that the 'independent, energetic, self-reliant, masculine and liberty-loving' Saxon centre ruled over the 'emotional, imaginative, feminine and gregarious' Celtic fringe.[24] Here, I am drawing on racial discourses of the time that variously constructed the Celts and the Saxons as individual 'races', while also denying Celtic claims to racial status depending on what was considered to be politically expedient within a specific context and time.[25] This sense of racial – and later ethnic[26] – superiority, combined with the belief that Englishness was portable and therefore cosmopolitan, served to show that the English were above the follies and the provincialism of crude nationalism. In disdaining loyalty to a purely local nationalism, and espousing a more internationally-focused Anglo-Saxon nationalism with London at the centre, the English demonstrated that they were fit to rule all ethnicities, races and interests.[27] The English may have drawn on a discourse of British nationalism when dealing with divisions and diversity within its 'internal empire', the United Kingdom, but, as Ben Wellings has argued, that does not mean that a specific form of English nationalism was absent. Rather, he asserts, it tended to lie 'hidden' within British nationalism.[28] It is my argument, then, that exchanges between Irish and English militant feminists served to expose the 'hidden' Englishness – directed as it was by a sense of Anglo-Saxon superiority – at the centre of British nationalistic discourse. Such an uncovering of just how influential this nationalist ideology was in shaping the feminist ideology of the WSPU helps us to understand how English militant suffragists were able to 'borrow' the politically militant strategies of Irish nationalists, for example, while denying the legitimacy of that very nationalism.

Militant connections and disconnections

The official bulletin of the WSPU from 1907 to 1912 was *Votes for Women*, which was edited by Emmeline and Frederick Pethick Lawrence until they were ejected from the organisation by Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst.[29] Although the Pethick Lawrences continued publishing *Votes for Women* as a vehicle for the concerns of militant suffragists in England, actual responsibility for voicing the demands of the WSPU passed to the newly established paper, *The Suffragette*, which was established and edited by Christabel Pankhurst until the war broke out.[30] Reflecting its heavily inflected wartime patriotic content, *The Suffragette* was relaunched as *Britannia* in 1915. These papers captured, among other things, the growing sense of frustration and indignation felt by militant suffragists in the English centre in the early years of the 1910s. They also give us an insight into how the English militants viewed the nature of the movement which they led and, to an extent, they allow us glimpses into how suffrage militants elsewhere, particularly in Ireland, reacted to this dominant English mindset.

Votes for Women reported that there was much linking the British and Irish suffrage campaigns, especially before the war commenced, and undoubtedly there was. Irish suffragists contributed articles to *Votes for Women*. News on what was happening in the Irish campaign appeared in the pages of the English paper (under 'Ireland' and then later under 'Ireland' and 'Ulster', although this was before the country was partitioned). Irish women formed distinct sections of deputations and pageants and parades in the English centre. English suffragettes visited Ireland to rouse support for the movement (including Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst). Irish militant suffragists were reportedly encouraged by the actions of their fellow militants in England. Certainly Margaret Cousins, one of the founders of the IWFL, had admitted that she had been inspired to form the militant Irish organisation after witnessing a WSPU meeting in Manchester. The London-based Pethick Lawrences, as editors of *Votes for Women*, had donated £260 for the establishment of the official organ of the IWFL, the *Irish Citizen*.[31] The WSPU even set up branches in Ireland, although these were not always welcomed by Irish nationalist suffragists. *Votes for Women* repeatedly commented on the position of Irish women in terms of the Home Rule Bill being negotiated at Westminster. Irish nationalist militant feminists, including Hanna and Francis Sheehy Skeffington, although determinedly reinforcing the point that the suffrage movement in Ireland

was distinct to that in England, supported the tactics of the WSPU and the rights of WSPU prisoners – whether incarcerated in England or in Ireland – especially when these prisoners were being denied political status and subject to force-feeding after hunger striking.[32] Later, Irish suffragists also declared themselves vehemently opposed to the renowned Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Health) Act of 1913, more commonly known as the Cat and Mouse Act, which allowed for hunger-striking suffragette prisoners to be continually released and then re-arrested once they had recovered their health.[33]

However, the view of Irish nationalist feminists that the Irish and British suffrage campaigns were separate, although connected, was irrevocably violated in 1912 when English militants carried out the previously mentioned hatchet and theatre fire activities in Ireland. That year the WSPU also stated that it was coming out in opposition to Home Rule politicians in retaliation at the role that those Irish politicians had played in the defeat of the Conciliation Bill that would have seen women across the UK enfranchised. The WSPU's decision to abandon militancy in 1914 in favour of working towards the imperial war effort confirmed the extent of the chasm existing between the nationalist militants in Ireland and the nationalist militants in England.[34] The decision made by English leaders to withdraw their movement from the north of Ireland further angered the IWFL because it had the effect of devastating the suffrage campaign there – even before Unionists and nationalists knew what was going to happen to their respective communities as they armed in anticipation of civil war. The WSPU and the IWFL were allied by the fact that they both fervently believed in the universalised notion of gender equality and were campaigning for a vote for the same parliament. But, their respective reactions to imperial and colonial politics and their entrenched and deepening senses of Irish and English nationalisms prevented any greater alliance, whether English suffragettes, in particular, acknowledged this state of affairs or not.

One distinctive element that unequivocally connected the WSPU and the IWFL, whatever their differences, was their collective dedication to conducting a militant form of suffragism, where militancy embraced both politically aggressive strategies and physically violent tactics. Militancy also connected the two national sites (in IWFL terms) or regional sites (according to the WSPU) in other ways. The WSPU declared that, since its

inauguration, Irish forms of militancy had inspired and directed its political efforts. *Votes for Women* made it clear that the WSPU had modelled many of its politically militant tactics on strategies introduced into British political culture by Charles Stewart Parnell and the Irish Party in 1885 (who had worked to oppose the election of Liberal Party candidates who were antithetical to Irish Home Rule). In 1910, the British paper commented that the 'glimpse into the working of the political machine which the Irish parallel affords is of great practical value to Suffragists of to-day'.[35] The paper likewise cited the militant tactics of the Ladies' Land League of the Parnell era, managed by the Irish Party leader's sister, Anna Parnell, as evidence not only of women's ability to be politically active more generally, but also of the debt of gratitude that Irish men owed their Irish sisters more specifically. This was a debt that could be honoured, *Votes for Women* said, through granting Irish women the franchise via amendments to the Home Rule Bill.[36]

The WSPU also declared that it drew inspiration from the physically violent tactics that men increasingly employed in the highly volatile Irish political sphere. Irish men – nationalist and Unionist – were fast proving to English militant suffragists that the British government was responsive to acts of physical violence. English suffragettes worked to expose the gendered double-standards governing both British and Irish politics; a standard that saw men's militancy accepted and women's rejected and condemned. Nearing the end of 1910, *Votes for Women* declared that if there were any people left who condemned women for 'taking vigorous action to win their liberty', they should look to male politicians who were threatening outright rebellion for a similar cause. For example, in an article entitled 'Ulster Will Fight', the paper pointed out that Unionist men had just announced that they were going to 'take forcible measures' if Home Rule was to become a reality on the island.[37] Two years later, in 1912, the paper referenced Irish political militancy again, noting: 'Militant Suffragists have not failed to notice that both Home Rulers and Unionists admit rebellion to be virtuous, provided there exist oppression and injustice which can be removed in no other way'. Declaring the rebellion of militant suffragists to be one of the 'most righteous the world has ever seen', *Votes for Women* asserted that militant feminists were in agreement with such endorsements of force. However, while drawing attention to men's validations of political violence, the paper also worked to remind readers that women had not

waited for men's sanction before launching their physically destructive feminist campaign.[38]

Suffragette indignation over the continuing double standard with regard to gendered forms of political violence only intensified. Public outrage in Ireland in response to the 1912 hatchet-throwing and theatre-burning incidences particularly angered the WSPU and motivated it to counter opposition to women's violence with a heated exposition on that of Irish men. 'No concession has ever been made to Ireland', *Votes for Women* declared, 'except in response to force – either Parliamentary force or physical force.'[39] This was true of the entire modern history of the island. For example, nineteenth-century Fenian violence, although causing death – including the death of a policeman in Manchester in 1867 and the executions of those responsible, deaths that marked Emmeline Pankhurst's memory – resulted in Gladstone-led reform, such as the Disestablishment of the Irish Church and the passage of the Irish Land Act of 1870. The no-rent campaign 'and the attendant outrages' of Parnell's Land League compelled the passage of the Land Act of 1881, *Votes for Women* declared. The Dublin Phoenix Park murders – namely, the assassination of the British Chief Secretary of Ireland and his under-secretary – although deplored by both Parnell and the English public, did not prevent the inclusion of Ireland in the extension of the electorate for the British House of Commons through the Reform Bill of 1884. All in all, the paper asserted, force has enabled victory to Irish politicians. English militant feminists wanted to know, then, 'whether or no Irish history gives warrant for violent and lawless action on the part of the politically disinherited'.[40] The sentencing of the WSPU prisoners in Ireland – those who had perpetrated the hatchet-throwing and theatre-burning incidences – to five years penal servitude while Irish male 'treason-mongers who have votes', and who continue to incite violence, go free incensed English militants.[41]

By 1913, when the use of violence for nationalist and Unionist ends radically intensified with the arming of the Ulster Volunteer Force and then the various nationalist forces, *Votes for Women* affirmed once again that the British government capitulated in the face of male violence, so why not women's?[42] The implication was, of course, that Irish political tactics, even if they amounted to treachery, and the British government's concessions because of those tactics, served to confirm that citizens who deserved a

direct say in the affairs of the United Kingdom could legitimately use force to campaign for that right. The WSPU adopted a universalised approach to the employment of militancy within the sphere of UK politics. It saw no difference between using militancy to bolster Irish moves for greater representation in a British parliament and a gendered campaign for the same aim. But, as events during the war were to reveal, the British feminist organisation certainly did not endorse the use of violence for anti-colonial activism within that same United Kingdom and against that same British government.

The WSPU may have endorsed the example set by Irish men who used violence as a political weapon, but it warned militant feminists – on both sides of the Irish Sea – against getting involved in Irish nationalist politics to the detriment of feminist politics. *Votes for Women* was adamant that English militant feminists should not take a side on the Irish Question. In the years immediately preceding the war, it also attempted to command Irish militant feminists to not take sides on the Irish Question in the same way that it had previously instructed English militants not to do so. In 1913, Irish women were told that their duty was clear: they were to prioritise the woman suffrage issue over questions of national politics. Nationalist and Unionist politicians in Ireland were fast committing themselves to anti-feminist politics, the paper asserted. The blame for 'this disgraceful state of affairs' lay with Irish women themselves who had been guilty of placing the claims of their parties before those of their sex.[43] In early 1914, the paper strengthened its instruction to Irish feminists to support gender politics over those of the Irish nation. It published a front page cartoon depicting an Irish woman staunchly rejecting nationalism and Unionism in order to prioritise gaining her own freedom as a woman.[44] This was not the first time that English militants had claimed that they had led Irish women towards the right suffrage pathway, and more specifically, that they had led Irish women on the pathway to feminist militancy. In 1910, on the occasion of Christabel Pankhurst's visit to Ireland, *Votes for Women* reported that Pankhurst had said that she was there representing the militant suffragettes of England so that 'she might be able to hand on to the Irishwomen the flaming torch which they would carry through the length and breadth of Ireland'.[45] Later that year, *Votes for Women* reported that Irish women had started their own militant campaign. In doing so, the paper made it clear that Irish women were 'following the example of their sisters across the sea'.[46]

Not all English commentators found this direction in Irish suffrage politics to be a positive one, of course. The British *Anti-Suffrage Review*, organ of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, certainly did not see Irish feminist militancy as being beneficial to Irish or to British society. But neither did it refute the claim that British women led the way. By introducing the wanton tactics of the WSPU into Ireland – window-breaking but then moving on to the 'even more dastardly' acts of hatchet-throwing and arson – English militants had 'brought discredit upon a country where Suffragists had up to this time remained uninfected by the hysteria of their kind in England'. Irish suffragists might not have perpetrated these actual crimes, the *Anti-Suffrage Review* admitted, but neither had they repudiated them. Therefore, they were implicitly guilty of tarnishing Irish society (where perfectly innocent women could no longer walk down the streets without fear of being attacked as perceived suffragettes). They were also guilty of further embittering and dividing Irish national politics (for Irish feminists could no longer hope to secure the endorsement of now alienated the Irish Parliamentary Party). The overall message of the article was that Irish women had naively followed in the footsteps of their more knowing radical English sisters. In doing so, they had, thoughtlessly, thrown their tumultuous country into further chaos.[47]

Yet, and seemingly at odds with their declarations that they had led Irish women to militancy, English suffragettes also fed into an increasingly popular discourse that claimed that the Irish were not only renowned for militancy but that they were naturally a martial 'race'. By 1911, in recognition of the growing militant suffrage movement there, Christabel Pankhurst affirmed that the 'women of Ireland come of a fighting race'.[48] Unlike English women, Irish women could work to secure enfranchisement under a Home Rule Bill and they were employing militant tactics in the attempt to do so. Therefore, they served as an inspiration for all suffragists, because if they used militant tactics to successfully secure the vote in a local parliament, then they would set a precedence for women across the United Kingdom to also win the franchise.[49] The idea that they were members of a naturally militant 'race' was one that the IWFL also increasingly espoused. In 1913, for example, *Votes for Women* cited the 1912 IWFL Annual Report when it recorded that the militant IWFL was the largest and most active suffrage society operating in Ireland. To demonstrate its assertion about the martial nature of the Irish, the English

paper quoted the IWFL as saying that the stature of its organisation demonstrated that 'militant societies are native to our soil, and that Irish men and women respond most naturally to militant appeal'.[50]

In 1915, the IWFL's *Irish Citizen*[51] published a speech delivered by renowned Irish nationalist, feminist and socialist militant, Constance Markievicz, which declared Irish women to be part of a proud race of warrior women. Markievicz had been advocating this line of thinking for a number of years.[52] She had presented lectures on the topic and had published her thoughts in women's periodicals (particularly the nationalist feminist paper, *Bean na hEireann* (*Woman of Ireland*) which preceded the *Irish Citizen* running as it did from 1908 to 1911).[53] She also led by example, being the only women to be sentenced to be executed for her military role in the failed 1916 nationalist uprising in Dublin, a sentence that was commuted to life imprisonment because of her sex.[54] Markievicz put particular pressure on the women of Ireland to take up this mantle of militant Irish femininity. 'I have never heard in the early history of any country so many stories of great fighting women as I read in the history of Ireland', she declared. Here she was referring to the stories of women (mythological and real) like Queen Maeve, goddess Macha, Ireland's pirate queen Granuaile, and many others.[55] Fighting was in the Irish woman's blood, Markievicz asserted. 'Ancient Ireland bred warrior women, and women played a heroic part in those days'.[56] Despite being published in a suffrage paper, Markievicz's main aim was to cajole Irish women into arming in support of nationalist politics – which Irish women were to do in substantial numbers for the various nationalist and Unionist militant campaigns from 1916 until 1923.[57] To increase the number of women inspired to take up arms for the nationalist cause, she issued the provocative statement that, today, the spirit of the warrior women of old was only alive in suffragettes and Trade Union women.[58]

Markievicz was not alone in claiming this distinct heritage for the women of Ireland. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and others repeatedly asserted that there was an ancient Irish tradition of gender equality: political, social, militant. The men of Ireland – who did not support this equality – had simply lost their way of late. It was up to the women of Ireland to help them get back in touch with this sense of ancient and equal nationalism.[59] Margaret Cousins used the onset of the Great War to issue

the call: 'One man, one gun; one woman, one gun.' As Cousins pointed out, women were already arming in Ireland in anticipation of civil strife between nationalists and Unionists – as evidenced by women's involvement with the Unionist Ulster Volunteer Force and the nationalist Cumman na mBan, the Women's Council, or women's auxiliary of the Irish Volunteers, and later the Irish Republican Army – and yet men were still applying the dictum that women were not and should not be militant, even in Ireland.[60]

As in England, militant suffragists in Ireland legitimised their militancy on the grounds that Irish men had long used this national heritage of militancy to achieve their aims and these tactics had proved effective. Like *Votes for Women*, the *Irish Citizen* stated that the actions of Irish men and the reactions of English leaders like Gladstone had taught Irish women the efficacy of violence.[61] In a country that was gearing up for civil war, feminist activists were continually confronted by an increasing reliance on brute force over peaceful constitutionalism. The *Irish Citizen* painted a picture of one such scene. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and her fellow suffragist, Margaret Connery, were arrested in October 1914 for attempting to address a crowd close to where the British prime minister, Herbert Asquith, was speaking. Nearby, male socialist activists, Jim Larkin, James Connelly and P.T. Daly, led a meeting, protected by a large body of men from the Irish Citizen Army with bayonets and rifles which they apparently discharged into the air from time to time. While authorities felt it incumbent to arrest and detain two unarmed female protestors, they made no attempt to interfere with gun-wielding men. The *Irish Citizen* declared that scenes such as these were strikingly demonstrative of the value of men's use of political force.[62]

There were substantial differences, however, between English suffragettes' use of Irish men's militancy to legitimise their feminist activism and that of Irish militant suffragists. English militants expressed their indignation on the grounds that while the British government was capitulating to men over in Ireland because of their constant threat of violence, that same government was torturing women – on its own soil – who were performing feats of a less dangerous nature for a cause that was equally or even more righteous than that of Irish nationalism. Irish nationalist feminists also expressed indignation that Irish men's violence was treated with much less severity than Irish or English women's. Yet, Irish militants differed from their English counterparts in that they also

positioned themselves alongside militant nationalist Irish men, as members of a distinctly martial 'race'. They used Irish men's and women's shared history of violent activism to claim a special nationalist relationship with militancy – for both sexes.[63] By the beginning of the war, Irish women were using the fact of their militant tactics less to affirm their bond with their English sisters, and more to connect more closely with Irish nationalism.

Disconnections: intensifying nationalisms on both sides of the Irish sea

By increasingly using their militancy to confirm their nationalist values, the IWFL was intensifying a nationalist ethos that it had determinedly espoused since its establishment. In November 1910, *Votes for Women* published a letter from Hanna's husband, Francis Sheehy Skeffington, which declared that the IWFL was in complete sympathy with the militant tactics of English suffragettes. That one of the IWFL's first acts was to send a vote of solidarity to militants in England demonstrated this. However, he was also at pains to alert readers of the English paper that the IWFL was 'an independent organisation, working on Irish lines and with special reference to Irish conditions'.[64] It was no mere off-shoot or follower of the WSPU. (Indeed, *Votes for Women* was to later register that the IWFL refused to let anyone other than Irishwomen join their group.[65]) Sheehy Skeffington admitted that English suffragists were the first to adopt militant tactics. He said there were two reasons for this. In the first place, Irish feminists had been too apathetic. Until now, they had been content to share the spoils once English women had won the franchise. Secondly, it had been difficult for Irish feminists to be active in the militant suffrage campaign because of the constitutional arrangement existing between Ireland and England. Irish politicians sat in an English-based parliament. The Cabinet Ministers heckled by the WSPU rarely travelled to Ireland, preferring to stay in England, the centre of power. However, once Irish feminists realised that they were not necessarily going to be included in any extension of the franchise to England, they were prompted to action.[66] The WSPU may have adopted militancy first but, Sheehy Skeffington averred, Irish suffrage leaders 'had always contemplated the adoption of militant tactics by Irishwomen themselves'. It was simply that opportunities were less forthcoming than in the British centre.[67]

The IWFL were galled when the WSPU abandoned its militant campaign in 1914 in favour of aiding the war effort. The WSPU's decision to do so provoked some heated exchanges in the *Irish Citizen*. On a number of occasions, correspondents wrote to the paper in support of Christabel Pankhurst's rousing wartime British patriotism revealed through her pamphlet, 'The War'. These writers called on Irish suffragists to remember that there were different pressures on English women to support the war effort than on their Irish sisters.[68] They also attempted to invoke the memory of the bonds existing between Irish militants and their English sisters. As one contributor put it, Irish feminists owed English militants a debt of loyalty and gratitude for the help they gave in developing feminist militancy in Ireland: 'why should the Irish paper be the one to condemn those who came to Ireland and helped in militant societies more than once?'[69] Without addressing the militancy issue, the editors of the *Irish Citizen* declared that the fact that the WSPU had failed to prioritise feminist activism over male militarism was unforgiveable. To support its critique of the patriotic English suffragists, the paper contended that even Pankhurst's followers in Great Britain were aware that their feminist leaders had 'abandoned their principles in the hour of crisis'.[70]

Of equally pressing concern for the editors of the Irish periodical was the lack of regard that the WSPU leaders had shown and were continuing to show for Irish politics. Here, at the outset of the war, the hatchet and theatre incidences of 1912 were raised again and this time they were more stridently criticised. Back in September 1912, the *Irish Citizen* had published an article that criticised the WSPU for interfering too much in Irish suffrage affairs. 'Many will regret', the article ran, 'that the campaign for woman suffrage in Ireland was not left entirely in the hands of the Irish suffrage societies, which are sufficiently numerous and sufficiently varied in their appeal'.[71] The *Irish Citizen* expressed solidarity with British militants' concerns over the fate of the WSPU prisoners who had perpetrated the acts, nevertheless, the paper went on to reassert the separateness of the English and Irish campaigns: 'We believe, however, that the rousing of the Irish people on this matter had best be left to Irish women, who understand the psychology of their countrymen as the ablest English advocate never can.'[72] In 1914, the IWFL paper redoubled its efforts to point out that Christabel Pankhurst, in particular, was not a leader

of the Irish movement, a fact that some readers seemed apt to forget.[73] More than this, the editors pointed out, as an English leader, Pankhurst had 'notoriously failed…to appreciate or take into account the special circumstances of the Irish movement'. In response to one correspondent's directive that an Irish suffrage paper should not criticise the English feminist's act of prioritising the war over militant feminism, the article continued by declaring that it was difficult to ascertain on what grounds 'an Irish Suffrage paper should be obliged to refrain from publishing criticisms of her public action'.[74] The following week, the *Irish Citizen* responded to the accusation that Ireland did not understand England's need to go to war to defend the Empire—an empire to which loyal suffragists were sincerely devoted—by reiterating its point about English disregard for Irish exceptionalism:

> With regard to our opposition to the W.S.P.U. invasion of Ireland, that is based on the principle that Ireland is not England. *The Irish Citizen* has always recognised the existence of the Irish Sea.[75]

By that stage, and certainly to the *Irish Citizen*'s editors, the growing gap between what might once have been cautiously perceived as a connected, though still separate and diverse sisterhood now seemed unbridgeable.

The same erosion of what was once certainly thought of as a feminist sisterhood by English militant suffragists was taking place on the other side of the Irish Sea. As with Irish nationalist suffragists, an opposing sense of nationalism was at the heart of the decay (although Irish suffragists also had the added grievance that English suffragettes had effectively abandoned the militant campaign).[76] Suffragette enthusiasm for feminist militancy had been transformed and channelled into a passionate support for male militarism (although, to be fair, the WSPU had always promoted male militancy if not exactly militarism, even if only to legitimise their own use of force). For the duration of the war – and in response to intensifying calls by Irish nationalists through Sinn Féin for complete separation from the United Kingdom and the British Empire – the Pankhurst paper, *Britannia*, denied the anti-colonialist aspirations of Irish nationalist feminists by claiming that Ireland was an intrinsically essential part of the multiracial and multicultural entity, the United Kingdom. 'Great Britain', Christabel Pankhurst announced in 1917, 'is a wonderful balance of temperaments, a wonderful blend of character and of race', so that to disturb that balance

and blend would be an absolute 'calamity'.[77] Pankhurst said that she spoke as part Celt which increased her appreciation of the matter. She then referred to the contempt for the Irish held by some, including the German-born scholar of Celtic languages, Professor Kuno Meyer (whom she referred to as 'that infamous spy' because he delivered a pro-German speech while in the United Kingdom during the war). She quoted Meyer as saying: 'I regard the Irish as an ill-balanced, emotional race, unfitted for self-government. I look upon them precisely as we Germans look upon the Poles – as a people only fit for poetry, rhetoric, and sedition.' While assuring her audience that the English certainly did not look on the Irish as a people fit only for sedition, Pankhurst nevertheless went on to endorse Meyer's view of the Celt as emotional. This emotionalism was not unwelcome, however. On the contrary, Pankhurst claimed to speak for the British metropole when she said: 'We look upon their romanticism as something which is necessary in this world.'[78]

Through *Britannia*, Pankhurst went on to clarify that there were more strategic reasons – other than temperamental balance – for wanting to keep hold of the Irish element of the United Kingdom. Politically, England needed 'Irish political co-operation at Westminster'; needed 'the Irish leaven in her political affairs'.[79] However, not unexpectedly given the war with Germany and Ireland's strategic position as a buffer to the Atlantic, England also needed Ireland's loyalty and union to ensure the security of the entire British Isles, and for the protection of England as the centre of both the United Kingdom and the Empire. To Pankhurst, the worst of it was that Irish nationalists also did not realise how vulnerable the Irish were. They were guilty of naively demanding their autonomy thereby leaving themselves open to invasion from the far superior, worldly and calculating Germans. 'Ireland is an Ireland which will fall victim to Germany within a day', *Britannia* asserted, for it cannot defend itself. 'What we say as ordinary British people', the paper continued, 'is that we do not want and we will not have Germany established in Ireland'.[80] Those leading Ireland on this seditious and ill-advised route did not know the 'real Ireland', which, by implication, Pankhurst did. They did 'not care for or appreciate the real Ireland and what the real Ireland can be'. Returning to the WSPU's earlier conviction that Britain had mismanaged Irish affairs, hence the militant organisation's support for Home Rule, though not independence, Pankhurst claimed that Ireland's 'real grievance' was simply that 'she has

never been understood, and that our men have ridden roughshod over her sentiment and her idealism'. Now was the time for the English to turn their minds to the Irish Question and repair the damage inflicted by unthinking English rulers on a delicate and fragile psyche, before the union disintegrates. Such a disintegration would surely bring calamity upon the entire civilised world; a civilised world led by the English.[81] (Only the previous week, *Britannia* had declared that an Irish republic would mark 'the end of England as a Great Power, and shatter the British Empire at a blow'.[82]) Pankhurst concluded that if only the women of England had been given the political power to tackle the Irish Question, they 'would have got on with the Irish people in a way that the men have never been able to do'.[83] Here she was guilty of ignoring the fact that Irish militant feminists had accused English women of doing exactly what Pankhurst accused English men of doing, namely riding roughshod over their Irish counterpart's sentiments and ideals.

The war had laid bare English militant feminists' construction of a fantasy nation – the United Kingdom – where the more knowing, bountiful and benevolent, if sometimes waylaid, English or Anglo-Saxon centre ruled over a more emotional, almost childlike, and certainly sometimes disruptive Celtic periphery. Ever evocative of Anne McClintock's trope of the family[84] – namely, the idea of the nation as a family with all the hierarchies that family structure implies – militant feminists in the imperial centre strived to create a suffrage movement that recognised English activists as the superior and core members (the imperial parliament for which everyone was striving to secure a vote was, after all, located in that national centre). These core members' Englishness and proximity to the centre of power allowed them to claim, in the words of Ghassan Hage, 'a dominant form of governmental belonging'.[85] The pages of feminist papers like *Votes for Women, The Suffragette* and *Britannia* operated as fantasy spaces in which women at the centre were constructed as superior (despite not being enfranchised), with those in the margins tolerated, included. As *Britannia* elucidated, the Irish 'enriched' the multi-racial or multi-cultural collective that was the United Kingdom.[86] Their emotional romanticism added to a 'nation' that was inevitably directed by the rational attributes of those at its Anglo-Saxon centre. In line with Hage's theories about the limits of tolerance, as soon as the Irish decided *en masse* to advocate for complete

separation from the nation – real and imaginative – that is to say when the ethnic or racial other (again drawing on popular racial discourses of the time) appeared to reveal a will of its own, the fantasy of 'a neatly positioned otherness constituting the national order' ended.[87] By ignoring Irish militant feminists' calls for recognition of their national distinctiveness, English suffragists perpetuated the unequal relationship of power existing between the English metropole and Irish margin. However, by refusing to allow English feminists to define Irish nationalist feminist identity, Irish nationalist suffragists called into question English feminist superiority and their fantasies of national inclusiveness.

Conclusion

Returning to Maylei Blackwell's caution earlier in this article, emphasising transnational connections – going with the 'Sisterhood is global' approach – runs the risk of overlooking the differences of the local and eliding existing inequalities, thereby confirming the continuity of those inequalities. By failing to acknowledge their position of privilege but using that status to ignore their fellow feminist militants' claims to national distinctiveness and autonomy, early twentieth-century English feminist militants revealed their allegiance to a strident form of English nationalism. English nationalism allowed for the women of the WSPU to promote the idea of a UK-based transnational feminist solidarity across the 'four nations', while actively denying the legitimacy of separate nationalisms within that construct. That nationalism also accounts for what many have characterised as the organisation's sudden and surprising turn away from suffrage politics and towards war work in 1914. The WSPU's 'turn' should have come as no surprise to Irish nationalist suffragists who had been continually confronted with English feminists' latent English nationalism in the pre-war years. In those years, a sense of English superiority had always been present in the writings and speeches of the WSPU – as exemplified by the organisation's attitude towards the Irish Question – despite Irish feminists' rejection of such a hierarchy. Therefore, far from confirming the much repeated story promulgated by the WSPU that Irish nationalism performed as the disruptive influence in otherwise rational British politics, I have used this article to argue that exchanges between Irish and British militant feminists

exposed the powerful, even dominating hand that English nationalism had in directing suffrage politics in the United Kingdom.

Notes

1. Suffragette is the term coined for members of the militant WSPU. Members of the militant body, the IWFL, also sometimes used the word when referring to themselves. However, I tend to use suffragette sparingly and instead employ militant suffragist with a national prefix in this article in order to more clearly delineate between Irish and British militants.
2. Hannam, Auchterlonie and Holden, *International Encyclopedia of Women's Suffrage*, 325. For a discussion of the complicated and contentious relationship between the Independent Labour Party and women's suffragists, particularly the WSPU, see Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, especially 65–78 and 79–95.
3. The first group of Irish women to be imprisoned in Ireland for their militancy consisted of eight women: Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Margaret Murphy, Jane Murphy, Marguerite Palmer, Marjorie Hasler, Kathleen Houston, Maud Lloyd, and Hilda Webb. They were arrested in Dublin in June 1912 for throwing stones through the windows of government offices. However, prior to this, in 1910 and then again in 1911, Irish women, including IWFL co-founder, Margaret Cousins, were imprisoned in England for participating in protests organised by the WSPU. See Murphy, *Political Imprisonment and the Irish*, 14.
4. Ward, "Conflicting Interests," 127–147.
5. Ryan, "Traditions and Double Moral Standards," 490; and, Ryan, "A Question of Loyalty," 21–32.
6. See Fletcher, "Women of the Nations, Unite!", 103–120. Elizabeth Crawford has published a reference guide that looks at the Irish suffrage movement as one of the regional campaigns within the larger British and Irish movement. I am not inclined to view the Irish movement as simply a regional branch of the overall combined British and Irish campaign, as I argue in this paper. Crawford has also explored the differences between the British and Irish points of view in an unpublished conference paper available on her Blog site. See Crawford, 'Suffrage Stories'. Also see Kelly, "Irish Suffragettes".
7. Hage, *White Nation.*
8. Here I am applying an understanding of transnationalism as the movement of people, institutions and ideas across and through national boundaries. See Iriye, "Transnational History," 212; Tyrrell, "Comparative and transnational history," 49; and, Curthoys and Lake, "Introduction," 6–20.
9. In the 1990s, a number of important works examined the international dimension of women's activism and interrogated shared and diverse understandings of feminism within that international context. See, for example: Tyrrell, *Woman's World*; Sinha, Guy and Woollacott, "Feminism and Internationalism," 345–600; and, Rupp and Taylor, "Forging Feminist Identity," 363–386.
10. See, for example, Paisley, "Introduction," 272.
11. For example, see Blackwell, Briggs and Chiu, "Transnational Feminisms," 4–6. Earlier scholars of 'Third World' feminisms also cautioned against overlooking difference in feminist historiography. See, for example, Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 333–358. While others stressed the complexities of Western women's involvement in imperial and colonial sites. See Chaudhuri and Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism'.*
12. Krishan Kumar refers to the UK as England's internal empire. See Kumar, "Nation and Empire," 575–608.

13. For example, see Gibney, “Early Modern Ireland,” 172–182.
14. For a detailed discussion of whether or not the Northern Irish conflict was an anti-colonial conflict, see Miller, “Colonialism and Academic Representations of the Troubles,” 3–39.
15. For general histories of the Irish suffrage campaign, see Owen, *Smashing Times*; and, Murphy, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*. In 2018, Margaret Ward’s and Louise Ryan’s 2007 edited collection, *Irish Women and the Vote*, was revised and republished to coincide with the centenary anniversary of the granting of limited woman suffrage in Britain and Ireland. For more nuanced discussions of the competing national and gendered loyalties, see: the previously mentioned ‘Conflicting Interests’ article by Ward. See also: Murphy, “Suffragists and Nationalism,” 1009–1015; Ryan, “Traditions and Double Moral Standards,” 490; and, Ryan, “A Question of Loyalty,” 21–32. In *Women of the Dáil*, 12, Jason Knirck argues that decisions about whether to pursue nationalist or feminist goals first was not about the ultimate desirability of one over the other but about ‘timing and priority’. For a detailed discussion on the differences of women’s nationalism in Ireland, see Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*; and, more recently, Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women*.
16. I am drawing on terminology that is in current usage—‘multi-cultural’ and ‘multi-racial’—to clarify the WSPU’s vision of the UK. It declared that the UK was a ‘blend of races’ and argued that it was the different cultural characteristics of the Anglo-Saxons, on the one hand, and the Celts, on the other, that gave it its distinctive balance in temperament. This is discussed in greater detail later in the article.
17. “Lack of Patriotism a Disease!,” *Britannia* 5, no. 27 (14 April 1916), 165 (Listed Nineteenth Century Collections Online (Gale) as *The Suffragette*).
18. McClintock, “Family Feuds,” 77.
19. For example, for a discussion of how fear of imperial decline coloured much anti-suffrage commentary, see Crozier-De Rosa, “Marie Corelli’s British New Women,” 416–429.
20. Hall, “Going a-Trolloping,” 180.
21. Kumar, “Nation and Empire,” 575 and 591; Marks, “History, the Nation and Empire,” 115–117; and Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 243–244.
22. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 232.
23. Ibid., 6.
24. Ibid., 45.
25. Luke Gibbon traces some of the debates over ‘race’ in Irish-British exchanges and argues that, whatever scholars now think of such claims to racial status, many forms of Irish cultural nationalism were predicated on notions of race and that such claims to racial distinctiveness prevented a substantial proportion of the Irish community from becoming citizens of the Empire. See Gibbons, “Race Against Time,” 207–223.
26. Young argues that ethnicity came to replace race as a category of classification in the mid-twentieth century, following the atrocities of the Nazi regime. See Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 232.
27. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 237–8.
28. Wellings, “Empire-nation,” 95–109.
29. Quoted in DiCenzo, *Feminist Media History*, 1.
30. Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, 195.
31. See, among other histories, Murphy, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*, 76; and Crawford, *The Women’s Movement*, 261.
32. For articles published in *Votes for Women* demonstrating Irish support for the WSPU prisoners in Ireland and another by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington on being imprisoned for militancy, see “The Suffragists in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin.” *Votes for Women* 5, no. 233 (23 August 1912), 765. For an account of the discussions leading to the decision to support

the moves for political status of the imprisoned English militants and the divisions this caused within the IWFL, see Murphy, *Political Imprisonment and the Irish*, 11–33.
33. See "Intermittent Torture of Suffragists." *Votes for Women* 6, no. 278 (4 July 1913), 590.
34. For a discussion of how Irish nationalist feminists accused English militants of being dishonourable feminists during the war, see the chapter on 'War and the Dishonourable British Feminist' in Crozier-De Rosa, *Shame and the Anti-Feminist Backlash*, 131–164.
35. "Holding the Balance of Power." *Votes for Women* 3, no. 96 (7 January 1910), 233.
36. See, for example, "An Irishwoman's View." *Votes for Women* 3, no. 102 (18 February 1910), 32.
37. "Ulster Will Fight." *Votes for Women* 4, no. 143 (2 December 1910), 138.
38. "The Right of Rebellion." *Votes for Women* 5, no. 216 (26 April 1912), 470. One month later, Votes for Women reported that both Mr Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland, and renowned Ulster Unionist, Sir Edward Carson, had asserted that Unionists would fight for their civil liberties and that the English public would endorse that fight. See "Inciting to Militancy." *Votes for Women* 5, no. 219 (17 May 1912), 523.
39. "Violent and Lawless Action." *Votes for Women* 5, no. 229 (26 July 1912), 700.
40. Ibid.
41. "The Women's Fight in Ireland." *Votes for Women* 5, no. 239 (4 October 1912), 851.
42. "Yielding to Force." *Votes for Women* 7, no. 314 (13 March 1914), 364. *Votes for Women* expressed outrage in 1914 when WSPU offices were raided but not those of Unionist leader, Carson, despite evidence that he was inciting treason. See "Belfast Offices Raided." *Votes for Women* 7, no. 318 (10 April 1914), 424; and "The Outlook." *Votes for Women* 7, no. 321 (1 May 1914), 465.
43. "The Betrayal of Ireland." *Votes for Women* 6, no. 259 (21 February1913), 298.
44. "Tim Healy's Zoo." *Votes for Women* 7, no. 314 (13 March 1914), 357.
45. "Handing on the Torch." *Votes for Women* 3, no. 106 (18 March 1910), 387. Irish suffragists had also invited Emmeline Pankhurst to visit the island which she did in 1910 and again in 1911. See accounts of her visit: "Mrs. Pankhurst in Ireland." *Votes for Women* 4, no. 135 (7 October 1910), 4; "Mrs. Pankhurst in Ireland." *Votes for Women* 4, no. 138 (28 October 1910), 53; and, "Mrs. Pankhurst in Ireland." *Votes for Women* 4, no. 162 (14 April 1911), 463.
46. "Mr. Birrell to Receive a Deputation." *Votes for Women* 4, no. 138 (28 October 1910), 53.
47. "Dublin Notes: Dublin Militants." *Anti-Suffrage Review*, no. 46 (August 1912), 188. For an extended discussion of the perceived effects of feminist militancy on Irish codes of chivalry, see Crozier-De Rosa, *Shame and the Anti-Feminist Backlash*, 204–210.
48. "Woman Suffragists and Irish Home Rule." *Votes for Women* 45, no. 189 (20 October 1911), 41.
49. Ibid., 41.
50. "Irish News." *Votes for Women* 6, no. 273 (30 May 1913), 514.
51. The *Irish Citizen*, established in 1912 by Margaret and James Cousins and Hanna and Francis Sheehy Skeffington, avowed that it was a paper whose intentions were to represent Irish suffragism, as distinct from the campaign in England. Within months of its establishment, the paper reported that it was selling perhaps 3,000 copies per week with a readership of over 10,000. See Murphy, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, 34.
52. In 1909, for example, she issued a call of arms to Irish women: arm yourselves to defend your country and do not trust the 'problematic chivalry' of men to protect you and your country. See "Editorial Notes." *Bean na hEireann* 1, no. 9 (July 1909), 8.
53. The *Bean na hEireann* was the organ of Inghinidhe na hEireann (Daughters of Ireland), a radical nationalist, pro-militant women's group that was to later merge with Cumman na mBan, the women's wing of the Irish Republican Army. For recent works examining the

women's press in Ireland around this time, see: Crozier-De Rosa, "Shame and Anti-Feminist Politics," 346–359; Innes, "A voice in directing the affairs of Ireland," 146–158; Louise Ryan, "The Irish Citizen, 1912–1920," 105–111; Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics*; Tiernan, "Tabloid Sensationalism," 74–87; and Columbus, *"Bean na h-Éireann*".

54. Accounts of Markievicz's militancy can be found in any of the histories of revolutionary Irish women cited in this article. For particular reference to the argument that Markievicz's memory has contributed to the historical amnesia about most other revolutionary women, see McCoole, *No Ordinary Woman*, 16; and Matthews, *Renegades*, 9. See also Steele, "Constance Markievicz," 62–79.
55. *"*The Women of '98" (By Constance de Markievicz). *The Irish Citizen* 4, no. 256 (November 1915), 150.
56. "The Future of Irishwomen" (Speech delivered by Countess Markievicz at IWFL Meeting, October 12th). *The Irish Citizen* 4, no. 23 (23 October 1915), 137.
57. For example, see Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*; Urquhart, *Women in Ulster Politics*; Cullen and Luddy, *Female Activists*; McCoole, *No Ordinary Woman*; Ryan & Ward (eds.). *Irish Women and Nationalism*; Matthews, *Renegades* and Matthews, Dissidents; Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women*.
58. Markievicz was also feminist in her aspirations. She was the first woman ever elected to the British House of Commons in 1919, although she refused to take her seat because of Sinn Féin's policy of abstentionism.
59. For a more detailed discussion of nationalist feminist approaches to invoking a renewed sense of ancient Irish nationalism, see Crozier-De Rosa, "Shame and Anti-Feminist Politics", 355–359.
60. "Sparks From The Anvil of War" (by Margaret E Cousins). *Irish Citizen* 3, no. 17 (12 September 1914), 132.
61. "Women's Rights." *The Irish Citizen* 3, no. 12 (8 August 1914), 93.
62. "Current Comment: A Contrast." *The Irish Citizen* 3, no. 20 (3 October 1914), 153.
63. For an extended discussion of Irish feminist militants' defence of their violence, see the chapter "The Shame of the Violent Woman" in Crozier-De Rosa, *Shame and the Anti-Feminist Backlash*, 193–230.
64. "The Movement in Ireland" (by F. Sheehy Skeffington). *Votes for Women* 4, no. 140 (11 November 1910), 83.
65. "Irish Women and Mr. Birrell." *Votes for Women* 4, no. 142 (25 November 1910), 132.
66. That Irish women had been left out of legislation that would have allowed English and Scottish women membership of County and Borough Councils brought home to the Irish the fact that until they fought on their own accord. The franchise would not necessarily be extended to them. The IWFL had established to achieve this end.
67. See above 64.
68. "Concerning Christabel." *The Irish Citizen* 3, no. 21 (10 October 1914), 166.
69. "Correspondence." *The Irish Citizen* 3, no. 20 (3 October 1914), 155.
70. Ibid.
71. "The W.S.P.U. in Ireland." *The Irish Citizen* 1, no. 17 (17 September 1912), 130. Elizabeth Crawford has discussed this article in her blog. See Crawford, "Suffrage Stories". For a brief discussion of the *Irish Citizen*'s response to the 1912 WSPU actions, see Crawford, *The Women's Movement*, 267.
72. "The W.S.P.U. in Ireland." *The Irish Citizen* 1, no. 17 (17 September 1912), 130.
73. "Correspondence." *The Irish Citizen* 3, no. 20 (3 October 1914), 155. This sentiment was repeated, for example, one year later when militant suffragist, M. K. Connery, writing to the *Irish Citizen*, asserted: 'I would like to also point out that Miss Pankhurst, though admirable

in her own country, which she thoroughly understood, has never founded or led anything in Ireland.' See "Correspondence", *The Irish Citizen* 3, no. 38 (6 February 1915), 290.

74. See above 69.
75. See above 68.
76. The Pethick Lawrences continued to campaign and to publish *Votes for Women* during the war but, as explained earlier, the Pankhursts channelled their energies into the war effort and transformed the WSPU paper, *The Suffragette*, into the much more jingoistic *Britannia*.
77. "Ireland and the German Peril." *Britannia* 1, no. 11 (17 August 1917), 84. This is an extract from a speech that Christabel Pankhurst gave at Queen's Hall on 26 July 1917 which was first printed in the paper on 3rd August and reprinted by request later in the month.
78. "Ireland and the German Peril." *Britannia* 1, no. 11 (17 August 1917), 84. Many of these sentiments, including those ascribed to Meyers, were repeated later in the year. See "German Designs on Ireland." *Britannia* 1, no. 14 (7 September 1917), 111; and, "German Designs on Ireland." *Britannia* 1, no. 21 (26 October 1917), 162.
79. "Ireland and the German Peril," *Britannia* 1, no. 11 (17 August 1917), 84.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. "Ireland and the German Peril', *Britannia* 1, no. 11 (17 August 1917), 84. Later that year, *Britannia* announced that the radical nationalist movement in Ireland was not really a distinctly Irish movement. Along with other disruptive movements like Leninism in Russia and MacDonaldism in England (referring to the Labour policies of Ramsay MacDonald), it was simply part of a global phenomenon leading towards chaos and the breakdown of order. See "German Designs on Ireland." *Britannia* 1, no. 14 (7 September 1917), 111.
84. McClintock argues that as nineteenth-century Britain viewed woman's subordination to man and child's to adult as 'a natural fact,' then 'the family' was as useful image to summon when referring to other 'natural' hierarchies—'the 'national family,' the global 'family of nations,' the colony as a 'family of black children ruled over by a white father'. McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven", 91.
85. Hage, *White Nation*, 88.
86. For a discussion of this discourse of 'enrichment', see Hage, 94.
87. Hage, *White Nation*, 99.

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For example, the UK Parliament website’s entry for “Suffrage in Wartime” states that Emmeline Pankhurst suspended the activities of the Women’s Social and Political Union to concentrate her energies on war work. See Parliament UK. “Suffrage in Wartime.” Accessed 14 September 2018. https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/suffragetteswartime/.

‘They’ll never understand why I’m here’: British Marxism and the Irish Revolution, 1916–1923

Charlie McGuire

ABSTRACT
The Irish Revolution of 1916-1923 posed a huge challenge to Marxist organizations in Britain. Although Marx and Engels themselves had supported Irish independence, later British socialists were not able to frame a consistent response to the Irish national question. Few organizations supported the Easter Rising in 1916 and although attitudes changed markedly during the Irish War of Independence, most British Marxists, with some notable exceptions, did not seem to view the Irish struggle against British imperialism to be connected to their own struggle for revolutionary change in Britain.

The Irish Revolution of 1916–1923 lies perhaps second in importance only to the Great Famine as an event—or related series of events—which would not so much shape as transform the course of modern Irish history thereafter. Beginning with the Easter Rising in 1916 and culminating in the Irish Civil War of 1922–1923, it was a revolution that was characterised by an explosive republican challenge to British rule and astonishing levels of labour militancy, but one, ultimately, that resulted in the creation of two conservative Irish states and the thwarting of Irish republican and socialist ambitions. Not surprisingly, it is a period that has long fascinated and divided historians, but which is also currently subject to unprecedented popular interest, as the so called 'Decade of Commemoration' moves into full swing.

The relationship between British social democracy and the Irish revolution has been examined.[1] But an area that remains relatively under-researched has been the connection between British revolutionary socialists and Irish revolutionaries. Although often referred to in passing in examinations of the Irish Revolution,[2] or the British socialist movement,[3] it has rarely been the main focus of study itself. The main exceptions here are David Reed's 1984 work, *Ireland: the Key to the British Revolution* and Geoffrey Bell's recent *Hesitant Comrades: The British Labour Movement and the Irish Revolution.* Reed devoted a chapter to the 1916–1921 period. Here, a contrast was made between the 'social democratic wing' of the labour movement, which included the ILP and Labour Party, who, in Reed's view, 'did not support the struggle of the Irish people for a democratic

republic' and the revolutionaries in organisations such as the Workers Socialist Federation (WSF) and, later, the Communist Party of Great Britain, (CPGB) who 'consistently' did support it, but were too weak to affect the outcome. Although criticised for focusing too much on the question of affiliation to the Labour Party during this period, the CPGB was singled out for praise by Reed for recognising the imperialist nature of the Treaty settlement in December 1921 and opposing it.[4]

Bell's excellent monograph began life as a PhD and also covers the period up to the Treaty in December 1921. The focus here is more on the Labour Party and trade unions, as well as the ILP. But the Marxist organisations are not ignored, and there is occasional, partial coverage of their input, which, like Reed's account, is based mainly on a review of their publications. Bell is also critical of the ideological shortcomings of the mainstream British labour movement organisations, and their failure to support or involve themselves in the campaign for full republican independence. The revolutionary socialist organisations are also subjected to criticism on these grounds, but in a milder fashion. And like Reed, Bell concludes his investigation by praising the CPGB, for its analysis of the Treaty, seeing it as their 'finest theoretic hour'.[5]

Perhaps what remains under-represented in the literature is an analysis that focuses more squarely and directly on the Marxist organisations; one that examines not only their pronouncements and their publications, but also some of their actions; one that looks at the inter-play between British and Irish revolutionaries; and, crucially, one that does not stop in December 1921, but which continues into the Civil War period. This paper is a contribution in this direction. It is intended to examine the input of British-based Marxist revolutionary organisations into the Irish Revolution, up to and including the Civil War. The focus will be placed on the Socialist Labour Party, (SLP) the British Socialist Party (BSP) and the CPGB which were the main Marxist organisations in British politics at that point.

Roots and context

Ireland had long been of interest to radical political activists in Britain. From the example of the famous Leveller, William Walwyn,[6] to the Scottish radical, Thomas Muir, who made connections with the United Irishmen in 1793,[7] the long struggle of the Irish for self-determination and freedom was

viewed as important. As political exiles in nineteenth century London, both Marx and Engels devoted time to analysis and political activism in support of Irish revolutionaries. Their view on the sequencing of revolutionary change in Ireland and Britain altered after the Great Famine but throughout their long years of political activism, the guiding principle of their work was consistent and twofold: firstly, the support they offered for Irish independence was based not merely on sympathy, and a desire to assist the liberation of the 'earliest English colony' from the 'iron hand' of a 'parasitic' oppressor[8] but a deep analysis of the economic relationship between the two countries. From the 1860s onwards, Marx increasingly viewed Ireland as the key to revolution in Britain, arguing that the destruction of the power of 'landed English oligarchy' in Ireland would erode its strength in Britain, and was the 'prime condition' of British working class emancipation.[9] Secondly, both recognised the autonomy of Irish organisations and opposed attempts by British socialists to control them. The best example of this was Engels' excoriation of Hales, a leading English member of the International, who had objected to separate Irish branches of the organisation in Britain, arguing that it was at odds with the 'fundamental principle' of the association, 'which was to destroy all semblance of the nationalist doctrine and remove all barriers that separated man from man'. For Engels, asking the Irish, a 'conquered people' to forget their nationality and 'submit to the conquerors' was 'not internationalism, but simply prating submission'.[10]

These principles of identifying a material basis for support of Irish independence and full respect for the independence of Irish organisations were something of a legacy that Marx and Engels bequeathed to British socialists, but, as will be discussed below, would not always guide their actions during the revolutionary era, an era that would open with the Easter Rising of 1916.

James Connolly, the Easter Rising and the British Socialist movement

It is appropriate that a discussion on the relationship between the Irish and British socialists during the Irish Revolution should begin with James Connolly. Born in Edinburgh in 1868 to Irish immigrant parents, Connolly was recruited to the socialist movement by John Leslie, secretary of the Edinburgh-based Scottish Socialist Federation. Leslie, twelve years older than Connolly, and also the child of Irish immigrants, had himself a long standing interest in Ireland. In 1894, he published a series of articles in the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) newspaper, *Justice,* where he sketched out a materialist analysis of Irish history under the Union.[11] Connolly's own classic challenge to bourgeois nationalist historiography, *Labour in Irish History,* was clearly inspired to some degree by this work, and it was Leslie who also encouraged the younger man to move to Dublin in 1896, to take up the position of organiser for the Dublin Socialist Society, later renamed the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP). Connolly's political focus from that point onwards was riveted on Ireland. He wrote prolifically on the relationship between Irish nationalism and socialism, arguing that only through the destruction of British capitalist-imperialism in Ireland could genuine independence be achieved. Only the 'incorruptible' Irish working class could lead this struggle, as the middle-classes were bound to British capitalism by a 'thousand economic strings'.[12] Connolly also maintained regular contact with British socialists in the form of letters, articles, speaking tours and even the establishment of some British-based ISRP branches. It would be during one of these tours that Connolly would assist his Scottish comrades who had split from the SDF, acting for a short spell as the first chairman of their new organisation, the SLP.[13]

From August 1914 onwards, James Connolly was of course committed to the idea of a Rising against British rule in Ireland. He believed that a decaying British imperialism could stave off its decline by defeating Germany and that if this happened, Ireland might be held in its grip and repressed for another generation, with the hard-fought rights and liberties of Irish workers being destroyed in the process.[14] It was as a result of this particular perspective that Connolly became convinced of the need to strike while the opportunity afforded by the war was still present. Both Kendall

and Challinor indicate that his former associates in the SLP were either involved in or knew about the 'preliminaries' for the Easter Rising,[15] but there is no evidence that this was the case. Indeed, given the secretive nature of the planning and the somewhat negative public attitude the SLP would later display about the Rising, it is almost certainly the case that they were not.

Connolly had maintained contact with the SLP, despite the strain in relations caused by his public rupture with US SLP leader and theoretician, Daniel de Leon. He had a regular correspondence with J.C. Matheson and, in later years, Arthur McManus, who by the outbreak of the First World War had become a leading figure within the SLP and editor of the party newspaper, the *Socialist.* In 1915, McManus had published Connolly's *Irish Worker*, following its suppression in Ireland, working 'night and day to get the paper printed and personally escorting it to Dublin, with the journal wrapped up in a parcel marked 'glass'.[16] The Belfast-born McManus was, like all of the SLP leaders, hugely influenced by James Connolly, but this was probably the full extent to which he and the party played in assisting the Irish socialist leader during this period.

Clearly, then, the SLP had close links with James Connolly, which had been sustained throughout many years of activity. But in the aftermath of the Rising, the party adopted a policy of silence. No support was offered to the republicans and no criticism was made of the government. There was no attempt to understand or analyse the reasons for Connolly's participation. At first glance, this seems odd, especially when it is considered that McManus did have some insight into Connolly's thoughts and actions. In November 1915 and January 1916, Connolly had written to the SLP leader, commenting on how the 'high handedness' and 'ruthlessness' of the British state was pushing Ireland to the point of 'social revolution'.[17] Most remarkably of all, there was no obituary of Connolly in the pages of the *Socialist* - in fact, no mention of his execution at all in the pages of the party he had helped to establish. And in the period following the Rising, the SLP would continue to say very little about Ireland. In the June edition of the *Socialist,* the party contented itself with the rather banal observation: 'leaving the merits or demerits of the revolt aside, it will now be realised that armies are the force used by capitalists to maintain their undisputed sway'.[18]

Harry McShane, then a member of the BSP in Glasgow, recollected in his memoirs that the SLP was 'completely split' by the Rising, and that while their 'best comrades' supported it, many others within the party who continued to hold to a syndicalist perspective did not 'because it was not based on industry'.[19] Certainly, the SLP was heavily influenced by industrial unionism and was yet to fully shake off its sectarian approach to other socialist organisations who did not subscribe to this model of revolutionary change. But the puzzle continues over why an apparently divided party could be so united in its silence on such an issue—especially if some of its leaders were in favour of it. The only conclusion to be drawn is that the SLP remained quiet on the Rising, because no section of the party either understood or supported it. It possibly appeared to them as a purely nationalist rebellion and so far removed from what they regarded as 'normal' socialist political activity, that it could not be supported. But at the same time, the party clearly did not want to publicly condemn the executed Connolly, hence the policy of silence.

This attitude of the SLP highlights some of the theoretical problems nationalism had posed for Marxists at this point. Although Marx and Engels had written a substantial amount about Ireland and supported Irish independence, no general principles had been established on the relationship between nationalism and socialism within or without colonial states. By the time of the Easter Rising, some important developments had occurred. In 1903, the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party had inserted a clause in its programme which granted a right of self-determination to those oppressed nationalities locked within the Tsarist state. However, this measure had provoked debates between some of the Bolsheviks who defended the clause, and those Polish Marxists who opposed it. The most significant of these was the debate involving Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, which fully opened up several years later. Lenin considered the clause to be a measure that would weaken the power of reactionary 'Great Russian' chauvinism and assist the building of 'an alliance of all proletarians of all nations on an equal footing'.[20] Interestingly, he drew on Marx and Engels' writings on Ireland to strengthen this argument, considering their work a 'splendid example of the attitude the proletariat of the oppressor nations should have towards national movements'.[21] However, Luxemburg theorised that national independence served no useful purpose, being a retrograde step for

industrial development in a Polish economy that had become fully integrated with its Russian counterpart.[22] More fundamentally, it was also an impossible demand to accommodate, as nearly every national claim was based on and resulted in the economic oppression of another national group, and was a damaging impediment to the necessary growth of international class consciousness.[23] The outbreak of war and the collapse of the Second International behind the banners of national patriotism and chauvinism stimulated further thinking on the matter. This was captured in Lenin's 1916 work, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism,* in which he identified some of the negative political consequences of imperialism upon the European working class movement. In particular was the connection between the 'superprofits' being made by the bourgeois classes through their empires and the reformism of the 'labour aristocracy', which Lenin saw as the main social prop of capitalist rule in Western Europe and the USA.[24] *Imperialism* would in time prove to be a hugely influential work, forming the basis for major shifts in international communist strategy in the post-Russian revolution era. However, all of that lay ahead. For now, few international socialists displayed much understanding of the importance of the national question in colonial states or the relationship between nationalism and socialism in colonial states. As a result not many showed much interest in the one national independence rebellion of this period that had a socialist leader, the Easter Rising. Lenin was among the small number that did, defending the rebellion as a genuine insurrection of a section of the Irish petty bourgeoisie and working class, while regretting that it had happened too soon 'before the European revolt of the proletariat had had time to mature'.[25] But his was very much a distant voice at this stage.

Harry McShane further noted in his memoirs that the Scottish socialist movement more generally was also divided by the Rising. He described attending socialist meetings in Ayrshire, where opposition to the Rising was expressed and also how the ILP and its newspaper, *Forward*—a journal to which Connolly had regularly submitted articles—condemned the Rising. McShane maintained that in Glasgow, it was only the BSP which was fully behind the Rising.[26] This is plausible as the Glasgow BSP had consistently taken a principled line against imperialism and the war in particular. Its guiding influence and most well-known activist, John Maclean, had just been jailed for his opposition to the war, and had in the past visited Ireland

for speaking tours.[27] Elsewhere, the BSP, which at this stage had just suffered a split over its attitude to the war,[28] took a line that appeared similar to that of the SLP. The new party newspaper, the *Call* offered coverage of the Rising and its impact. But the tone of the commentary was not overly sympathetic. In its 18 May edition, the *Call* noted that the Irish had risen 'without adequate force' and 'like every such Rising', the action had been 'doomed'. Two weeks later the newspaper also appeared to either forget or overlook the principal achievement of Easter Week: the proclamation of the Irish Republic. This happened when the paper discussed comments made by Liberal leader, Asquith, that both home rule and partition be implemented. Asquith's suggestions were described as 'doomed to fail' but apparently only as a result of partition and not because Home Rule itself was an inadequate measure.[29]

The only British socialist organisation which did appear to support the Rising was Sylvia Pankhurst's small Workers' Socialist Federation. In the 13 May edition of the *Women's' Dreadnought* she described the Rising as 'reckless' but praised it for being 'undoubtedly animated by high ideals'. The *Dreadnought* highlighted the egalitarian aspects of the Proclamation and noted its commitment to full male and female suffrage. The party also enjoyed something of a coup when one of its members, Patricia Lynch, was able to slip through the military cordon in Dublin and report first-hand on the aftermath of the Rising. Her reports remain valuable today for many reasons—not least for the way that they challenge one of the hardy perennials of Irish revisionist historiography—that the 1916 rebels lacked support and sympathy from the local population.[30]

British Socialists during the Irish War of Independence

The period after the Rising saw the onset of a revolutionary crisis for the British state in Ireland. Police reports show that as early as June 1916, a growth in support for republicanism was already visible.[31] Within 18 months, the Irish Volunteers, soon to be known as the Irish Republican Army, (IRA) had been rebuilt and the Irish Parliamentary Party's (IPP) decades-long hegemony within Irish nationalism was unravelling. In April 1918, Conscription was defeated following a campaign that was largely led by the labour and trade union movement.[32] Eight months later Sinn Féin had swept a large majority of Irish seats in the British General election and

in January 1919 declared a rival Irish Parliament and government, Dáil Éireann. This would be followed by a brutal guerrilla war between the IRA and the British state. A key dynamic during this entire period was the unprecedented level of labour militancy. In 1914, there had been 5900 workers involved in strike action, and a total of 290,000 strike days; by 1918, this had risen to 70,8000 workers and over 1.4 million strike days.[33] In 1919 alone, there were twelve local general strikes,[34] including the famous Limerick Soviet.[35] From various directions, then, the British writ in Ireland was subject to the strongest of challenges.

During this period, Ireland became a far more pressing issue for the British socialists. As well as the changes in socialist thinking globally brought about by the Bolshevik revolution, this increased concern was a direct response to the escalating violence of the British state and its hypocritical flouting of its own supposed democratic principles. This led to greater contact with Irish revolutionaries, some of which were ephemeral, like that between Captain Jack White and the BSP in the spring of 1918. White had famously trained the Irish Citizen Army and had been jailed for attempting to bring miners in South Wales out on strike in protest against the executions in May 1916.[36] In April 1918, he appeared on a number of BSP platforms, where he urged British socialists to do more to assist the Irish revolutionaries, chided them for their weakness and maintained that he had not met more than one in a hundred who, when asked to take action in support of Ireland, had not responded with the comment 'what will the government do'?[37] White's connection to the BSP was perhaps not significant but his advice to them, and the earlier example he had set in 1916 was, as we will see, very much in line with the expectations that the emerging centre of world revolution would also have of its British comrades.

Perhaps the most significant input from a British Marxist organisation in this period came from the Socialist Labour Party. The SLP by this stage had become less politically sectarian and had also sloughed off its reticence towards the unfolding Irish revolution. Contacts were established with Irish republicans and significant levels of propaganda work were being undertaken. The party was embroiled in a destructive internal crisis over the moves towards the formation of a British communist party,[38] but clearly viewed Ireland as an issue upon which it could distinguish itself from the

remainder of the British Left and make progress. On 5 February 1920, the *Socialist* was clear on the connections between the Irish struggle and the prospects of revolution in Britain:

> More and more Ireland is proving itself the storm centre of the British isles … Ireland is a powder magazine, the explosion of which, if carefully timed and organised in harmony with events in the mainland will undoubtedly hoist the shaky fabric of the 'glorious' British empire into the air.

One week later, in an article that condemned the British for attempting to provoke another 'Easter' bloodbath, the *Socialist* again identified a connection between the two struggles:

> Ireland cannot be successful without the mainland of Britain. Our revolutionary success in the mainland will be assured by the solid support of the Irish working class. We must redouble our efforts on both sides of St George's Channel. We can neither of us afford to be caught unprepared.[39]

In addition to this, there were regular references to James Connolly. For example the cover of the May Day 1920 edition had a montage of images titled 'communists of the Revolution: Past and Present', which included Connolly, Marx and Luxemburg. Three months later, the party NEC passed a special resolution, which noted:

> A subject Ireland is necessary to safeguard the commercial sea-routes of the British Empire … an Independent Irish Republic means the first step in the disintegration of the British Empire at its very centre … the proclamation and successful establishment of such a Republic would be the signal for a united onslaught on British capitalist-imperialism by all of the nations whose necks are under the heel of ruthless militarism stretching from India to Ireland.[40]

The SLP was dismissive of those within the British labour movement who 'merrily' passed resolutions on Ireland, but did little else to stop the British war machine.[41] By way of contrast, the party did make some efforts at more direct involvement in the struggle. Close links were built with a small clutch of socialists in Belfast, who had split from the ILP and organised themselves into the short-lived Revolutionary Socialist Party of Ireland. One member of this organisation, Kathleen Coyle, penned an occasional column in the *Socialist,* under the name of 'Selma Sigerson' which was far more scathing of Sinn Féin and its 'neo-capitalist' tendencies than most of the offerings from British socialists.[42] Three other leading figures in this

group were John Frederick Hedley, Charles O'Meagher and Simon Greenspon. This trio had all been involved in the famous Belfast general strike of January 1919 and had also been jailed four months later for 'unlawful assembly', after organising a series of socialist meetings in Belfast.

Hedley is of particular interest to our discussion. Born in Goole in 1884, he had been a stoker in the navy but had become a socialist and deserted in 1918, before becoming involved in socialist activity in Belfast. Following his release from jail in the summer of 1919, Hedley became active in the SLP in Sheffield but in January 1920 was arrested again under the Cat and Mouse act and returned to Crumlin Road prison in Belfast. In April, he embarked on his fourth hunger strike in just 12 months, and was eventually released in May. A 'Jack' Hedley defence fund was established during this period by the SLP, with his wife contributing updates on his health to the *Socialist.* Hedley would later become an organiser for the ITGWU and play a leading role in at least three of the major workplace occupations and soviets that were set up by workers in Munster during 1920–1922.[43] In May 1921, Hedley was sentenced to six months hard labour for making seditious speeches to sailors in Portsmouth, following a secret trial that was held under the provisions of the Emergency Powers Regulations.[44]

In addition to the connections with the Belfast socialists, there were also strong links between the SLP and a group of socialist republicans in Dublin, who in 1919 had briefly taken over the leadership of Socialist Party of Ireland, (SPI) with a view to affiliating it to the newly-established Communist International (Comintern) Most of these socialists had a background in Irish republican activism. The group included 1916 veterans Paddy Stephenson and James Connolly's son, Roddy, but the one who would build closest links with the SLP was Seán McLoughlin. McLoughlin had played a leading role in the Easter Rising and in the post-Rising re-organisation of the Irish Volunteers.[45] But he was also a socialist and during 1919 made contact with the SLP and began writing letters to the *Socialist.* During 1920–1921, McLoughlin spent long periods in Scotland and England, undertaking speaking tours that were organised by the SLP. During this time, he joined the SLP and helped develop the organisation's understanding of the Irish Revolution, pushing it to greater efforts in support of the republican struggle. McLoughlin later claimed that he had been asked by Michael Collins to make contacts with the British Left, in

order to secure political support, as well as material support, in the form of arms and money, for the struggle against British imperialism.[46] His efforts are worthy of consideration, because he was one of the very few Marxists who attempted to theorise the relationships both between Irish nationalism and socialism and the Irish and British revolutions. In a significant article published in the *socialist* in February 1920, McLoughlin argued that while all socialists needed to support the demand for an Irish republic, they also had to be aware of the contradictory class interests locked within the republican struggle. 'Who is going to rule in an Irish Republic' he asked, 'that will be the rock upon which Sinn Féin is wrecked'. Developing Connolly's 1916 'hold onto your rifles' instruction to the ICA, McLoughlin maintained that while socialists would assist republicans in the struggle against British imperialism, 'the fight to overthrow British power in Ireland may not be half as bitterly contested as the fight between the Irish working class and Irish middle class for control of the country'. He concluded by urging socialists to continue the Irish revolution, 'as the Russians had' beyond 'the point marked by their exploiters', towards the workers republic.[47] Shortly afterwards, in a report sent to the Comintern sub-bureau in Amsterdam, McLoughlin analysed closely the various organisations within the Irish independence and labour movements, dismissing the Sinn Féin leaders as 'people of a bourgeois outlook' and pinning his hopes on the 'proletarian' IRA rank-and file, who, he claimed, could be won to a position of active support for socialism.[48] These tensions between Irish nationalism and socialism would be revealed more clearly and explored in more depth by socialists following the signing of the Treaty in December 1921, but McLoughlin's articles constituted an early attempt to grapple with the problem.

On the relationship between the Irish and British revolutions, McLoughlin argued that the Irish struggle was linked to that of the struggle for socialism in Britain, through being directed against the same ruling class. But unlike virtually all socialists of that era, McLoughlin felt that socialism would be established in Ireland before Britain. He believed that this would detonate uprisings throughout the British Empire, which would in turn precipitate the destruction of capitalism in Britain itself. McLoughlin believed that the triumph of socialism in Britain would be the only way that an Irish socialist republic could be sure of long term survival. As a result of

this analysis, he urged Irish and British workers to support both Irish independence, and the socialist movements in both countries.[49]

Most of McLoughlin's political activity in Britain was dedicated to this objective. His meetings were held initially in the main cities and towns in Scotland, but spread to the north of England and eventually went as far south as Coventry. These gatherings often drew huge crowds, sometimes several thousand strong. In his speeches, he continued to make the connection between the interests of Irish and British workers and would often warn his audiences that the Black and Tans of Ireland today would be the Black and Tans in Scottish and English cities tomorrow. McLoughlin's membership of the SLP would later end in acrimony, but forms an important episode in the story of the connections between British and Irish revolutionaries in this period.[50]

Many of these SLP meetings in Scotland and England were organised as 'Hands off Ireland' events. The regular use of this slogan was a clear reference to the successful 'Hands off Russia' campaign which had been supported by all sections of the British labour movement, including some trade union leaders, but which on the ground was driven by communists.[51] The highpoints of the campaign were the stopping of the *Jolly George*, on 10 May 1920, shortly after the Polish invasion of Russia and the mass demonstrations organised by hundreds of 'councils of action' three months later, which pushed the TUC and Labour Party leadership to threaten a general strike.[52] Challinor points out how the CPGB (or those who would soon form it) effectively excluded the SLP from participation in this organisation, at least at leadership level, and that this was another reason behind the party's more concentrated focus on Ireland.[53]

But the SLP was not the only grouping involved in Irish solidarity work. Another segment of the Scottish Left, organised around John Maclean, also engaged in such activity. As noted earlier, Maclean had a long-standing interest in Ireland, first visiting the country in 1907, where he took part in a speaking tour in support of the Belfast Dockers who were on strike led by Jim Larkin. Maclean also visited Ireland for a short speaking tour in the summer of 1919, where he shared platforms with Seán McLoughlin, among others.[54] Maclean's interest in the Irish republican struggle had intensified by this stage. He regarded this struggle as constituting a severe crisis for British imperialism and capitalism, but was also interested in the way that

republicanism and socialism could be blended, and how this might be applied in a Scottish context.[55] Maclean held regular 'Hands off Ireland' meetings, including one at Motherwell in July 1920, which was attended by between 2000 and 3000 people, where he and ally James McDougall called for the withdrawal of British troops and suggested that the Lanarkshire miners go on strike in support of this demand.[56] Seven months later, the Giffnock miners would do just that, stopping for 24 hours 'in protest against British atrocities in Ireland' and calling on the remainder of the Lanarkshire coalfield to do likewise.[57]

In addition to the meetings, there was also propaganda, including most famously, *The Irish Tragedy: Scotland's Disgrace*, a 1920 pamphlet that sold around 20,000 copies, and represented Maclean's most detailed analysis of the issue. In this work, Maclean outlined a materialist basis for his support for Irish independence and displayed the connections he perceived between that struggle, and the struggle for socialism in Britain. Like some within the SLP, Maclean regarded the Irish working class as the principal force within the revolutionary struggle and argued that a successful Irish independence struggle would be the prelude to an Irish socialist republic, which would weaken capitalism everywhere.

> Should Ireland get a Republic the class war will then burst out and be fought till Irish Labour wins … This new phase in Irish life ought to be the inciting influence to British Labour … Ireland's victory is obviously the prelude to Labour's triumph throughout the world.[58]

Maclean later took aim at those British socialists who could not see the geo-political significance of the Irish independence struggle against British imperialism:

> The Irish situation obviously is the most revolutionary that has ever arisen in British history, but unfortunately lads who fancy themselves the only revolutionaries are too stupid or too obsessed with some little crochet to see the tight corner the Irish are placing the British in … The Irish Sinn Féiners, who make no profession of socialism or communism and who are at best non-socialists, are doing more to help Russia and the Revolution than all we professed Marxians in Britain.[59]

The efforts of the SLP in 1920–1921 and John Maclean's BSP and Tramp Trust groups are among the most significant made by the British Left during the Irish Revolution. These efforts also included involvement by a group of SLP activists in a strike in Dublin, on the issue of Jim Larkin's

imprisonment in the USA.[60] But by themselves, they were efforts that could not have a mass impact. Not only were these small forces, but they were also in decline at this point. As a result of its crisis over the formation of the CPGB, the SLP was struggling to survive and had effectively disappeared by the end of 1922. Maclean, brutalised by repeated imprisonment and politically marginalised by the CPGB, eventually died aged just 44 in November 1923. The larger organisations of the labour movement of course did have far more potential. But here, there was little will to act in such a fashion. Shortly after the start of the munitions boycott by Irish trade unionists in May 1920, a special TUC conference was organised to discuss Ireland. At this meeting, the Miners showed willingness to act by passing a resolution that called for industrial action, in the event of the government failing to end both the military occupation of Ireland, and the production of war materiel. But this resolution was neutralised by the NUR leader, JH Thomas, who ensured that the conference passed another resolution calling for a truce and the establishment of an Irish parliament with dominion status—a settlement that no section of the Irish revolutionary movement was advocating. Thomas was able to argue that the Miners' resolution would be enacted only if the government failed to move on the NUR proposal.[61] But when it is considered that Thomas had already met with Lloyd George the previous month and agreed with him that the munitions boycott was tantamount to a 'war upon the government', it is clear that he had little intention of supporting strike action, no matter that the government did or didn't do.[62] The *Socialist* in particular, recognised the crucial role that the British working class could play in support of the Irish independence struggle.[63] It duly criticised Thomas for failing to support the munitions boycott,[64] but it made little difference; in the period ahead, the British state would be responsible for some appalling acts of violence in Ireland,[65] but there would be no action against it by the trade union leaders.

Partition

During 1920–1921, the final outcome of the Irish Revolution remained unclear, but there were powerful forces within Irish society and the British state threatening to divert it away from the type of thoroughgoing social and political transformation envisaged by the more radical socialist republicans. A key debate in this respect was that surrounding the possible partition of

Ireland. The suggestion that some of the Ulster counties be excluded from Home Rule had been mooted by the British government in 1913, and would remain central to their approach until the eventual creation of Northern Ireland in 1920–1921. The crisis threw into relief some of the complexities of the Irish national question. It revealed substantial opposition to Irish independence from a considerable section of the protestant working class, which in turn would constitute a serious challenge to socialist thinking and practice in the period ahead.

James Connolly had written extensively on the threat of partition in 1913–1914. His famous prediction that partition would generate a 'carnival of reaction' was an argument based primarily on material, class considerations; he was concerned about the impact the measure would have on Irish workers and feared it would 'destroy' the 'oncoming unity of the labour movement'.[66] These class-based fears were accompanied with sharp attacks on what Connolly considered to be the phoney nationalism of the IPP who had reluctantly accepted the measure, and the cynicism of the Ulster Unionist bourgeoisie, who stood to benefit from it. Connolly remained convinced that the Irish capitalist class was too weak to lead a struggle for full national economic and political independence, and that only Irish workers could achieve this. But while there was truth in his depiction of the Irish bourgeoisie–no section of this class, north or south, was able to lead this struggle to a successful conclusion– Connolly never did tease out precisely why its north-eastern component was so supportive of the union and so uninterested in economic development elsewhere on the island. Rather than probe the connections of this class to British capitalist-imperialism, he appeared to regard unionism as based mainly on sectarianism and held out a hope that the exploited protestant working class would eventually recognise its true class interests and reject those who 'hide their sweatshops behind Orange flags'.[67] Connolly's ideas and approach would provide the framework for most Irish and British socialists in the post 1916 period, in their attempts to understand and deal with the issue.

Throughout these years, the entire Irish Left would remain hostile to the prospect of partition. Even in Belfast, which had a mainly protestant labour and socialist movement, all genuine labour and socialist political organisations were opposed to the measure and supported the principle of Irish self-government on a 32-county basis.[68] The reconstituted Belfast

Labour Party was the principal Socialist organisation in the city and in both the 1918 general election and 1920 Corporation elections, had successfully stood on such a platform.[69] Like their Irish counterparts, British Marxist organisations were hostile to the possibility of partition and also tended to the view that orangeism and unionism were ideological creations of the northern bourgeoisie, constructed to control and dupe the protestant working class. The BSP had made clear its objections to unionism and the possibility of partition in 1916. Dismissing protestant religious fears as 'a bogey largely created for political purposes', the *Call* described as 'absurd' the argument that Ulster was a homogenous unit. The newspaper outlined Ulster's economic importance to the rest of Ireland and concluded that partition would be akin to 'permanently depriving France of the territory now occupied by the Germans'.[70]

Sectarian violence reached exceptionally high levels during this period. In Belfast alone, 453 people were killed in the 2-year period during July 1920-July 1922. Although they made up just 25% of the city's population, 257 of these victims were Catholics. Around a quarter of Belfast's catholic population also lost their jobs, and 23,000 were forced out of their homes.[71] Belfast Labour was also routed, with its North Belfast hall being burned down by loyalists and its candidates physically prevented from campaigning in the inaugural 1921 Northern Ireland parliament elections. This upsurge in political violence was commented upon by the British socialist press, but a deeper inability to explain the popularity of unionism within protestant society remained evident. Instead, unionism continued to be viewed as a 'yarn', spun by the industrialists to entrap the protestant working class. It continued to be viewed as a superficial ideology from which protestant workers might be detached. In September 1920, the *Socialist* rightly noted how the shipyard expulsions had included thousands of protestant socialists and trade unionists. It condemned the 'Carson Clique' for fomenting this violence in order to protect their class interests. As for those who carried out the attacks, they were dismissed as 'Orange fanatics' and the 'worst product civilisation has known'.[72] A slightly more developed view of unionism was offered a year later by the CPGB's Willie Paul. In his pamphlet, *The Irish Crisis,* he pointed out how the economic interests of the northern bourgeoisie were 'intertwined' with those of the British capitalism generally, and how this bourgeoisie was reliant for its continued prosperity on unfettered access to imperial markets.[73] But the

materialism stopped there. The rest of Paul's argument constituted something of a flight both from Connolly, and reality. He predicted that during a 'revolutionary crisis' the 'peculiar psychology of Orangeism' with its 'fierce and violent hatred' of its enemies' might result in protestant workers turning against the unionist bourgeoisie and moving towards socialism.[74] To say that this was wishful thinking is perhaps an understatement. But throughout this entire period, the possibility that a key section of the protestant working class might exist as a labour aristocracy and consider its marginal material privileges to be bound up with Unionism was never interrogated by any section of the British Left.

Communists, the Treaty and the Irish Civil War

By 1921, the CPGB had become the dominant British Marxist organisation. Launched in August 1920, it was composed mainly of the BSP, along with sprinklings of other smaller groups. Other developments were also taking place. In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, a new Communist International had been formed, which identified the national and colonial question as a subject of prime importance. As indicated above, Lenin's *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* had signposted this development. Flowing from his analysis was the view that the world had been divided into a small number of oppressor states and a large number of oppressed countries. For the first time, this brought the focus of European socialism onto those oppressed countries, which were now seen as important to the prospects of destroying capitalism globally. At the 1920 Comintern Congress, the national and colonial question was examined in depth. Distinctions were drawn between reactionary and progressive forms of nationalism and a set of theses drawn up which committed communists from imperial states to actively support revolutionary nationalist movements in colonies.[75]

In relation to Ireland, this suggested that British communists should offer active support for the struggle of the IRA against the British state. As if to clarify what was actually meant—and not meant–by this, Karl Radek offered the following prescription:

> The International will not judge the British comrades by the articles they write in the *Call* and the *Workers' Dreadnought* but by the number of comrades who are thrown in gaol for agitating in the colonial countries. We would point out to the British comrades that it is their

> duty to help the Irish movement with all their strength, that it is their duty to agitate among British troops, that it is their duty to use all their resources to block the policy that the British transport and rail unions are at present pursuing of permitting troop transports to be shipped to Ireland. It is very easy at the moment to speak out in Britain against intervention in Russia, since even the bourgeois left is against it. It is harder for the British comrades to take up the cause of Irish independence and anti-militarist activity. We have a right to demand this difficult work of the British comrades.[76]

The CPGB had in its ranks a number of theoreticians with an interest in Irish politics, but appeared reluctant to prioritise Ireland over Russia in this fashion. In his first comment on Ireland in the *Communist,* T.A. Jackson made it clear that this would not happen. He argued that while the Bolshevik forces were part of the 'World Army of Proletarian Revolution' the Irish question was at root a national question. With CPGB resources finite, the question 'was one of degree and urgency and on the grounds of superior urgency alone we can justify our concentration on the Russian aspects of the struggle'.[77]

The 1920 Comintern Congress was also significant because the Irish communists themselves had taken part. Their emergence would provide another ingredient to the revolutionary mix. Two delegates, Roddy Connolly and Éadhmonn MacAlpine, made the long journey to Petrograd and were involved in the discussions on the national and colonial question. They clearly saw in the theses a confirmation of their own strategy, which had been based around assisting Irish republicans in a clandestine fashion.[78] The Irish communists, however, would not enjoy a fruitful relationship with their British counterparts. Connolly appeared unimpressed with the British communists from the earliest point, and later reflected that their 'mode of political life was far removed from anything like illegal or conspiratorial activity'.[79] In February 1921, whilst in Moscow, he submitted a report to the Comintern Executive (ECCI) which criticised the British communists for their alleged inactivity on the Irish question, noting that how, beyond the press articles, they had 'taken very little interest in helping the Irish communists'. In this report, Connolly held out the hope that a liaison committee of the two parties could be established, which would 'strengthen the connection between them'.[80] However, relations between Irish and British communists did not improve. In August 1921, the CPGB started an Irish *Workers' Republic* column in the *Communist,* which was originally penned by Connolly. At this time, the Irish communists were engaged in a

final attempt to gain control of the SPI. In his articles, Connolly made caustic references to the leaders of the party, Tom Johnson and William O'Brien, who were also the two leading figures in the Irish Labour Party and trade union movement at this point. Supporting communists and exposing the manifold shortcomings of social democracy was a basic founding principle of the Third International, but rather than support Connolly against the Irish social democrats, the CPGB, irked by the tone of his remarks, decided to remove him as a contributor, commenting that they had 'neither preference nor choice' between these 'rival personalities'.[81] It is true that some of Connolly's remarks verged on the juvenile but this was still an unprincipled approach by the CPGB and opened up a breach that would never be properly healed.

In the subsequent period, British communists would develop little by way of a formal relationship with the CPI, preferring to cultivate links with republicans and Labour activists. With a truce agreed between the republican leaders and the British state in July 1921, the political climate in Ireland became more settled, allowing for connections to be strengthened between the CPGB and some leading republicans. In November 1921, T.A. Jackson visited Dublin and also met with the leaders of a number of other organisations, including the ITGWU, ICA, as well as the local communists.[82] However, Jackson and the CPGB's actual understanding of the Irish Revolution, specifically the relationship between Irish republicanism and socialism, lacked the clarity of the work that had been published by Seán McLoughlin in particular in *the Socialist* and appeared uncertain and inconsistent. For example, in April, he argued that socialists should support Irish independence because it would pave the way for socialism. He contended that whilst an Irish republic would not be socialist, it was a necessary step towards the Irish working class 'freeing itself from the need to subordinate their class interests to the cause of national unity'.[83] It was an analysis dismissed as 'Menshevist' by his fellow CPGB member, P.L Gray, who argued that it would be a mistake to offer uncritical support to an Irish capitalist republic and how in their propaganda, British communists needed to highlight the dangers of nationalism and reinforce how the 'Cause of Dublin Castle was the Cause of the British Capitalists'.[84]

The main focus remained the negotiations between republican leaders and the British state. In December 1921 this eventually produced a Treaty that established a 26 county Irish Free State within the British Empire, and

also copper-fastened partition. According to his own accounts, Willie Gallacher was tipped off about the agreement and travelled to Dublin, where he advised republicans to oppose the Treaty, arrest the plenipotentiaries who had signed it and issue a proclamation with some CPGB-inspired social policies. Gallacher was welcomed as a friend by Cathal Brugha, Liam Mellows and Rory O'Connor, but—not surprisingly—his suggestions were politely declined.[85] The CPGB itself had expected that the talks might break down on the issue of the oath, and appeared surprised by the Treaty. Uncertainty characterised its early attempts at analysis. In his first post-Treaty deliberation, Jackson criticised the British government for refusing to allow an Irish republic and for continuing to support unionism. The British had, he argued 'gained much and lost little … except their dignity and honour'. His article, however, said little about the Treaty itself, or the class interests that it seemed to uphold, beyond the somewhat vague observation that Irish workers would be 'disappointed' by it.[86] The contrast with the CPI position was striking. The Irish communists clearly believed that the class divides within the nationalist struggle, which the Sinn Féin leaders had attempted to conceal, had now been blown open. On the same day of the Jackson article, the Irish communist newspaper offered a withering class analysis, which depicted Michael Collins as an 'imperialist careerist' and forecast 'civil war and social hell' should the agreement be ratified.[87]

In the following week's edition, Jackson displayed again that he was out of touch with Irish communist thinking, when he stated that while nobody pretended to like the Treaty wholly, 'nobody denied that in its substance it represented a gain on 1914'. Jackson continued that 'those who should be qualified to judge' had no faith in the ability of republicans to maintain a military struggle. He indicated that an economic revival as a result of peace might take place, and that this would open up class differences and the emergence of a proletarian party.[88] Much of this was at odds with the position of the CPI, who even at this early stage were now predicting and preparing for civil war. However, one week later, the CPGB executive released a statement which displayed a substantial shift towards the Irish communist position. Here, the Treaty was redefined as an agreement forced upon Ireland by British imperialism and designed to safeguard Britain's imperialist interests. The statement made clear that the CPGB associated itself with the Communist Party of Ireland analysis 'in its refusal to

recognise this Treaty as anything but the death-knell of the Irish Republic'.[89]

Clearly then, the CPGB position on the Treaty had been confused and diffident. The strident analysis later praised by Reed and Bell emerged only after the party was shunted into line with the CPI position. In April 1922, the political picture in Ireland seemed to become clearer, if more tense, when a section of the IRA, which included socialist republicans Liam Mellows and Peadar O'Donnell, seized the Four Courts in Dublin. As well as being the centre of the Free State's judicial system, the takeover had an obvious symbolism, in that it had previously been occupied by republicans during the Rising. Around the same time, CPI leader Connolly travelled to Germany in an attempt to regularise relations between the Irish communists and the ECCI. His communications here also offer more insights into Irish communist relations with their British comrades. In his report, Connolly continued to complain that the CPGB had been of no assistance to the CPI or the Irish revolutionary struggle. 'They have helped us in no way financially, materially, morally', he pointed out, 'despite all the theses they … do not help our press, carry out no propaganda among British soldiers in Ireland'.[90]

The eventual outbreak of Civil War in June 1922 created a political environment fraught with danger for the communists. The context in which it occurred, where neither the Treatyites nor anti-Treatyites had made much reference to social or economic issues, served to confuse and divide workers. By any normal standards, this was not conducive to the development of working class politics. But the communists did not see it like that. On the contrary, as a result of the bourgeois class forces that it considered stacked up behind the Free State regime, the CPI saw in the Civil War a historic opportunity to build up its political strength. It believed that the anti-Treaty republicans might be persuaded to shift to the Left, in order to garner the support of the working class for the Republic. The ECCI shared this view and in the aftermath of the outbreak of conflict, it intervened. ECCI representative, Mikhail Borodin, was dispatched to London. On 14 July he had a meeting with the leaders of both the British and Irish communist parties and on 15 July interviewed the Irish leaders separately.[91] The purpose of these meetings was to review the situation in Ireland 'with a view to working out a programme to embrace the various groups and classes that make up the Irish people'.[92] The outcome of this in

the immediate term was a 10-point socialist programme, which Roddy Connolly and Seán McLoughlin presented to anti-Treaty IRA leaders a week later in Fermoy, County Cork.[93] According to Connolly, Chief-of-Staff, Liam Lynch was sympathetic, but outlined the primacy of the military struggle. A second outcome of this meeting was the establishment of more formal relations between the two parties. CPI official, George Pollock stayed in London, to help out with the production of the *Workers' Republic* paper, which was banned in Ireland. A room in King St was rented from the CPGB to assist with this task.

Over the next few months, the communists made strenuous efforts to influence and assist the IRA. Seán McLoughlin rejoined the IRA and led a flying column in Limerick. Connolly travelled to Germany in an unsuccessful attempt to secure an arms deal for the republicans. The CPGB also did its best to influence the IRA directly. In September, McManus and JT Murphy travelled to Dublin to meet with the IRA leadership. There, they presented the republican leaders with a social programme similar to that drawn up earlier by Connolly and McLoughlin. The CPGB leaders reported the response as 'excellent' and stated that many republicans were willing to support communism. An agreement was signed between the 2 delegations, pending acceptance by their respective executives. The subsequent CPGB perspective was optimistic in the extreme:

> If by every possible means, military, economic, political, help can be rendered the IRA by the communist movement, thus demonstrating by deed the fundamental unity of purpose in their movement and the struggle towards communism, the future of the republican forces is one with ours.[94]

Pollock may have accompanied the British communists on this trip. In 1948, he recalled a 1922 meeting with two British communists and IRA leaders. Pollock insisted that at this meeting the proposition was put to the IRA that they popularise the social programme and establish a provisional government in the south. He claimed that IRA Quartermaster, Tom Derrig, whilst repeating the line about the importance of the military struggle, nonetheless suggested that the communists go ahead and set up such a government, 'promising that it would have the support and protection of the IRA.[95] However, despite the optimism of the communists, the civil war was proving disastrous for the IRA. The Free State took control of Dublin after one week of heavy fighting and by mid-August had dislodged the

republicans from their remaining strongholds further south. From that point onwards the IRA was forced into a guerrilla campaign, which although partly successful against the British, was unlikely to prevail in the zero-sum battle context of civil war. By October, the tide was flowing strongly in the direction of the Free State. Feeling that it was now possible to strangle IRA resistance completely, the regime announced the establishment of military courts with the power to pass death sentences. In November 1922, the executions began.

In October, a delegation of seven CPI members attended a CPGB conference at Battersea Town Hall. Their aim was to secure a greater level of support and involvement from the British party. At the conference, a resolution was passed, which 'heartily agreed' with the analysis and strategy of the CPI. This of course was based on continued communist involvement in and support for the anti-Treaty IRA. Whatever about the sagacity of such a policy, the CPGB support of the CPI position did suggest a more positive state of affairs between the two parties. However, it was a facade. Underneath, the relationship was close to breaking point. McManus and Murphy were now of the view that the only obstacle to the recruitment of left-wing Irish republicans and labour activists to communism was the chaotic CPI itself.[96] On the other hand, the Irish communists remained dissatisfied with the British party, claiming that all they were getting by way of help were 'pious resolutions'. Connolly spoke at Battersea and in his speech appealed to British communists for assistance in the propaganda work against the Free State and 'imperial England'.[97] In response, the CPGB committed itself to the creation of 'Hands off Ireland' committees, which were designed to prevent the transport of war materiel to the Free State.[98] Later, there was also talk by the CPGB of organising a freeze on exports to the Free State.[99] This was very much the type of activity the Comintern wished to see from British communists, but the commitment appeared to be purely verbal. No 'Hands off Ireland' activity took place and no freeze on exports to the Free State was attempted. The CPGB would be later criticised by Moscow for its lack of input into the Irish revolution.[100] But by that stage, the CPI, and indeed the Irish Revolution itself, would have long passed into history.

The remainder of the story of British communism and the Irish Revolution is an unhappy one. Relations between the CPI and CPGB

worsened. The IRA was effectively defeated by December 1922 and although the civil war would continue into April 1923, its outcome was not in doubt. The CPI, small, never particularly stable, and unable to speak with just one voice on what constituted the appropriate level of communist involvement in the republican struggle, toiled in this difficult environment. The party became more divided in the aftermath of the 1922 Comintern Congress, following a shift in strategy by the ECCI, which encouraged communists to withdraw from active involvement in the IRA and offer only 'moral support' to republicans.[101] One casualty of this division was Connolly, who lost his leadership of the party, being temporarily replaced by former CPGB activist, ABF White.[102] White had no experience of Irish politics and her installation as leader could only have come through CPGB pressure. Throughout this period, the CPGB played an unfortunate role in deepening the crisis of the CPI, setting itself up as an adjudicator on the precise definition of 'moral support' and dispatching Tom Bell to the reconvened CPI conference in February 1923 to ensure that the Irish communists accepted this definition.[103] By the end of 1923, the CPGB was in cahoots with the recently returned Jim Larkin, clearing the way for the final dissolution of the CPI. But by this stage, the Irish Revolution was long gone. Republicanism had been battered to defeat and the Left had been vanquished. British communists would be involved for a period thereafter in the attempt to build an alternative to Free State neo-colonialism and Orange reaction, but assessment of these efforts is beyond the scope of this article.

Conclusion

On the eve of his execution in May 1916, James Connolly had an emotive final meeting with his wife Lillie and eldest daughter, Nora. During the visit, Connolly, reflecting on his actions, and what he knew to be the outlook of the British Left, asked Nora if she had seen any of the socialist newspapers. When Nora replied that she had not, Connolly retorted 'They will never understand why I'm here … they will all forget I am an Irishman'.[104] As we have seen, these would prove to be prophetic words, because in 1916, very few socialists did understand why James Connolly had ended up in the GPO. Most saw the Rising as a nationalist rebellion, an act of militarism, which could not serve working-class interests. Attitudes

would change. Throughout much of the ensuing Irish revolutionary period, British socialists would become more aware of the reasons behind Connolly's actions in 1916, more able to distinguish between reactionary bourgeois nationalism and revolutionary anti-imperialism, more understanding of the connections that existed between revolution in the colonies and socialism in the metropolitan states themselves. But how should their efforts be judged and what legacy, if any, did it create?

The year 1916 can be seen as a low point for British socialism in its understanding of the realities of Irish revolutionary politics. Marx and Engels may well have offered a theoretical and practical guide to the Irish national question for British socialists, but it is clear that in 1916, the British Left's response owed more to the ideas and thinking of the Second International—the same International that in 1907 had debated the merits and demerits of a 'socialist colonial policy'[105] and the same brand of socialism that in 1914 would watch on, and in many instances cheer, as the European working class marched to the killing fields of France and Belgium. The need for a more penetrating analysis of the relationship between nationalism and socialism in colonial states, and the notion that the political terrain of a colonial state differed to that of a colonising state, and required a different response from socialists, was not widely understood or accepted by European socialists in this era—and certainly not by most British socialists.

The violence of the British state and its decision to meet a popular movement for Irish freedom with force and repression eventually brought about a change in the attitudes of the British Left. The global context was also different by the stage. The first successful socialist revolution had taken place. Coupled with this was a developing understanding of the importance of the national and colonial questions. This led to greater emphasis on the Irish independence struggle, and greater support for it. During the War of Independence, the most significant organisation was the SLP. Unlike other groupings, the SLP forged direct links with sections of the Irish revolutionary movement. The party based its support for Irish freedom on materialist grounds and appeared more aware of the connection between the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland and the struggle for socialism in Britain. A similar approach was also in evidence from John Maclean and his small band of revolutionary socialists in Glasgow. But In

both instances, the organisation was weak, and the influence was limited. The SLP was finished by 1922 and Maclean would be dead by 1923.

The responsibility for organising British revolutionary socialism's involvement in the Irish Revolution passed to the CPGB. The organisation had in its ranks a number of leading activists and theoreticians with a long-standing interest in Irish revolutionary politics. The CPGB was small by international communist standards, but still had a membership of around 12,000—which made it several times larger than that of the combined forces of the SLP and Maclean. Moreover, it could also draw on the support and resources of the Communist International, which had identified a successful Irish anti-imperialist struggle as central to one of its most important strategic aims–the weakening of the global power of British imperialism.

However, the CPGB would have a more restricted input into the Irish Revolution. The organisation did produce propaganda and attempted to build a rationale for socialist support of the Irish independence struggle. The CPGB also made connections with some Irish republican leaders and were treated with consideration by them, even if their communist prescriptions were gently ignored. On the other hand, the CPGB did not make any attempt to organise Hands off Ireland activity. Neither did it adopt a policy of agitating among British troops. As we have seen, there were isolated instances of British socialists taking part in such activity. But these tended to be individuals with no connection to the CPGB. If the British communist contribution to the Irish revolution was to be measured by the number of British communists gaoled for such activity, then the judgement would be a harsh one indeed.

The Russian connection was an undoubted source of strength to British and Irish communists, but also accentuated the problems between them. The ECCI expected the CPGB to exercise a fostering role over the CPI. The negative implications of such a relationship had been spelled out 50 years earlier by Engels. All too often, the CPGB acted with a paternalistic arrogance. There is no doubt that the Irish communists were weak and ineffective, but when it came to analysis of the political situation in Ireland, they were streets ahead of their British counterparts. The fact that the CPGB had to step into line with the CPI analysis of the Treaty is perhaps the best example of this. The British communists seemed unable to analyse the class basis of Irish republicanism, or the relationship between Irish republicanism

and socialism, in any consistent, coherent fashion. But despite this, the CPGB continued in its attempts to dictate Irish policy. In 1923, this would reach the heights of instructing the Irish communists—12 of whom were either in prison or had been imprisoned– the degree to which they should be involved in a republican struggle that had been all but destroyed by the Free State.

How then should the efforts of British socialists be considered? There is no doubt that the centuries-long tradition of support for Irish freedom by British radicals was further enhanced and developed by British Socialists during the Irish Revolution. Moreover, this tradition was transformed into a wider appreciation of the need to oppose imperialism more generally. This particular tradition has informed and contextualised some aspects of British socialist activity in the decades that have passed, not simply in relation to Ireland, but further afield. It was perhaps most recently in evidence in the 2-million strong March against the invasion of Iraq in 2003. But to return to Connolly's comment. After 1916, British socialists did develop a greater understanding of the republican struggle in Ireland. They certainly had more awareness of its importance. They knew it could not be ignored and needed to be supported. But for many, it still remained an issue of secondary importance. It was all too often a struggle not seen as vital to, or even connected to, their own, more important in their eyes, struggle for revolutionary change in Britain.

Notes

1. See Gibbons, *British Labour Party and the Establishment of the Irish Free State*.
2. See, e.g. Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly*; O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*.
3. See, e.g. Challinor, *Origins of British Bolshevism*; Redfern, *Class or Nation?*
4. Reed, *Ireland*, 74–8.
5. Bell, *Hesitant Comrades*, 213.
6. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 336.
7. Smith, "Irish Rebels and English Radicals, 1798–1820," 79.
8. Engels to Marx, 23 May 1856, in Marx/Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question,* 84.
9. Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, 29 November 1869, in Marx/Engels, *Ireland and Irish Question,* 378, 379.
10. Council meeting, 14 May 1872, Marx/Engels, *Ireland,* 504–11.
11. Republished as Leslie, *The Irish Question 1894*.
12. Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, XXXii.
13. Nevin, *James Connolly*, 205.
14. For more on Connolly's views here see the *Irish Worker*, 29 August 1914; *Workers' Republic*, 20 November 1915; *Workers' Republic*, 9 October 1915, 8 April 1916.

15. Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900–1921,* 158.
16. Challinor, *Origins,* 127.
17. One of these two letters was published in the *Socialist,* 17 April 1919. The other letter was seized by police, following McManus' arrest in 1916.
18. *The Socialis*t, June 1916.
19. McShane, *No Mean Fighter*, 82, 83.
20. Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination,* 35.
21. Lenin, *The Right of Nations,* 52.
22. Luxemburg, *The Industrial Development of Poland.*
23. Shelton, "Rosa Luxemburg and the National Question," 300.
24. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 13, 14.
25. Fox, *Marx, Engels, Lenin on the Irish Revolution,* 19.
26. McShane, *No Mean Fighter,* 82, 83.
27. Milton, *John Maclean,* 35.
28. In April 1916, the pro-war Hyndmanites had been defeated and would later leave the BSP. But as Kendall points out, the new BSP leadership adopted more of a pacifist opposition to the war, and refrained from taking unilateral action against it. Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement,* 171.
29. *The Call,* 1 June 1916.
30. *Women's Dreadnought*, 13 May 1916.
31. McGarry, *The Rising*, 281.
32. For a recent discussion on the role of the Labour movement in this campaign, see McAuliffe, "Workers Show their Strength," 75–92.
33. Fitzpatrick, "Strikes in Ireland, 1914–1921," 36.
34. O'Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland, 1917–1923,* 25.
35. For more on the Limerick Soviet, see Cahill, *Forgotten Revolution*.
36. White was jailed for three months. See the *Daily Mirror*, 18 May 1916; *Liverpool Echo,* 24 May 1916.
37. National Archives (UK) kV 2, 1654, 'British Socialist Party, Report of Openshaw meeting', 27 April 1918.
38. The SLP had been involved in negotiations with other socialist groups, which had the aim of establishing a communist party in Britain. The question of whether a communist party should seek affiliation to the Labour Party divided the SLP. The party leadership, including Tom Bell, McManus and Willie Paul were in favour of this, but a majority of the membership were opposed. The leadership was eventually expelled and later helped form the CPGB. The SLP never fully recovered from this trauma.
39. *Socialist*, 12 February 1920.
40. *Socialist* 19 August 1920.
41. *Socialist,* 13 January 1921.
42. Greaves, *The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union*, 235. Some of Coyle's writings were republished as *Sinn Féin and socialism* by the Cork Workers' Club in 1976.
43. Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution*, 256, 317.
44. *Western Daily Mail*, 21 May 1921; *Portsmouth Evening News,* 20 May 1921.
45. For more on McLoughlin's life and times see Charlie McGuire, *Sean McLoughlin: Ireland's Forgotten Revolutionary,* (Pontypridd: 2011).
46. National Archives (Ireland), Bureau of Military History, Witness Statement 290, Sean McLoughlin. All BMH witness statements can now be accessed online at: http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/index.html
47. McLoughlin, "Sinn Féin and the Irish Workers."

48. National Library Ireland, William O'Brien Papers, 15,674 (3), 'Report of the Political Organisations of the Working Class; also published in *socialist,* 27 May 1920.
49. For more detail, see *The Socialist,* 27 May 1920.
50. McLoughlin was expelled from the SLP in September 1921, following the circulation of a false rumour that he was a police agent. He returned to Ireland in July 1922 and later joined both the CPI and IRA.
51. Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 79.
52. Klugmann, *History,* 79–85.
53. Challinor, *Origins,* 265.
54. Milton, *John MacLean,* 209.
55. For a more detailed consideration of Maclean's views on the Irish and Scottish national questions, see Howell, *A Lost Left,* 210–7.
56. *Motherwell Times*, 9 July 1920.
57. *The Socialist,* 27 January 1921.
58. Maclean, *The Irish Tragedy*, 9.
59. Howell, *A Lost Left,* 212.
60. *Socialist*, 5 August 1920.
61. *Times,* 14 July 1920.
62. *Times*, 6 June 1920.
63. *The Socialist,* 10 June 1920.
64. *The Socialist*, 24 June 1920.
65. Many of which are detailed in the report of the Labour Commission to Ireland, (London: 1921), *passim.*
66. *Irish Worker,* 14 March 1914.
67. *Forward,* 11 March 1911.
68. Genuine, i.e. not the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, a yellow, bogus labour political organisation which was established by the Ulster Unionist Party in 1918 in order to maintain its grip over the protestant working class.
69. The four Labour candidates stood in predominantly protestant seats in 1918, receiving around a quarter of the votes. In 1920, Labour performed exceptionally well, gaining over 17,000 votes and 12 seats, making it the official opposition to the Unionists on Belfast Corporation.
70. *The Call*, 1 June 1916.
71. Farrell, *Northern Ireland the Orange State,* 62.
72. *The Socialist,* 16 September 1920.
73. Paul, *The Irish Crisis,* 1.
74. Paul, *Irish Crisis,* 2, 3.
75. Lenin, *Speeches at Congresses of the Communist International*, 57.
76. Reed, *Ireland,* 71, 72.
77. *communist,* 9 September 1920.
78. 'Comrade X' [Roddy Connolly], *Report of the Proceedings of the Second Comintern Congress,* 143, 144.
79. Tape of Roddy Connolly speech to the Ireland-USSR Friendship society, October 1974, courtesy of Mike Milotte.
80. Russian State Social and Political Archives (RGASPI), 495/89/10/2–3, Report to Comrade Kobietsky for the Comintern Executive by Roddy Connolly, 10 February 1921.
81. *Communist,* 15 October 1921.
82. *Communist,* 26 November 1921.
83. *Communist*, 2 April 1921.
84. *Communist,* 14 April 1921.

85. Greaves, *Liam Mellows,* 268, 269.
86. *Communis*t, 17 December 1921.
87. *Workers Republic*, 17 December 1921.
88. The *Communist,* 24 December 1921.
89. The *Communist,* 31 December 1921.
90. RGASPI, 5/3/581/9-17, Report to the Comintern on the Irish Party, R.Connolly, Berlin, 12 April 1922.
91. RGASPI, 495/89/13-6/10, Borodin Interviews Delegates from the Irish Party, 15 July 1922.
92. National Archives (UK) CAB 24/138/cp4132, Report on the Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom, 27 July 1922.
93. Milotte, "communist Politics in Ireland 1916–45,"110.
94. RGASPI, untitled CPGB report to ECCI, 495/89/13/82-84.
95. *Irish People,* 14 February 1948.
96. RGASPI, untitled CPGB report to ECCI, 495/89/13/82-84.
97. National Archives (UK) Report on the Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom, CAB 24/139/cp4292, 26 October1922.
98. RGASPI, Report of the CPI to the ECCI from October 1921 to October 1922, 495/89-16/69.
99. Labour History Archive and Study Centre, James Klugmann Papers, untitled notes for history of the CPGB, CP/Ind/Klug/03/05.
100. ECCI, *The communist International between the Fourth and Fifth Congresses,* 37. This report noted that the CPI (which was by then defunct) needed more 'material support' from the CPGB.
101. RGASPI, 495/89/11-6/7, Resolution of the ECCI Presidium on the Irish Question, 13 December 1922.
102. RGASPI, 495/89/22-12/17. Resignation of Roddy Connolly to secretary of ECCI, 20 February 1923.
103. RGASPI, 495/89/22/35–36, ABF White and JJ O'Leary to Comintern, 22 August 1923.
104. Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly,* 420.
105. Redfern, *Class or Nation,* 20.

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‘As imperialistic as our masters’? Relations between British and Irish communists, 1920–1941

David Convery

ABSTRACT

Soon after its formation, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was tasked by the Communist International with assisting their Irish comrades to develop their organisation. This article outlines the relations between British and Irish communists from 1920 to 1941 and argues that, notwithstanding the selfless work of some British communists, the CPGB on the whole exhibited a patronising and paternalistic demeanour towards the Irish that failed to consider the latter’s perspective on an equal footing to its own, even in their own affairs. This attitude, combined with its position within the heart of the British Empire, is indicative of ‘cultural imperialism’.

‘*Not only the Irish, but the working class all the world over is looking to us. We are being weighed in the Irish balance, and if we are found wanting, not all the enunciations of orthodox formulae, not all the protestations of the purity of our Communist faith will save us from contemptuous dismissal as faithful, though sometimes talkative, servants of the British Imperial oligarchy’.*

Executive Committee, Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), 25 November 1920.[1]

To outside observers, the struggle of the Irish for national and social emancipation from the tentacles of England has often been a noteworthy feature of the history of the modern world. It has been especially so for revolutionaries. Nestled in the heart of the British Empire, the most

powerful and far-reaching force of the day, Ireland had the potential to undermine its very foundations, inspiring liberation movements throughout the globe.[2] So tightly bound to the imperial project was Ireland that in 1870, Marx himself declared it as 'the special task' of the International Workingmen's Association in London 'to awaken a consciousness in the English workers that for them the national emancipation of Ireland is no question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment but *the first condition* of their own social emancipation'.[3] Indeed, as some historians of the CPGB have noted, 'In the recent history of the British Isles, Ireland provided the one authentic insurrectionary experience, both as premonition and domestic variant of the European revolutions of 1919–23'.[4] For those concerned with building socialism in Britain then, Ireland should have been of central importance.

The CPGB was founded in 1920 at the height of the Irish 'troubles'. Inspired by the Russian Revolution and the creation of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1919, the CPGB, although small with only 4000 members, united most of the revolutionaries in Britain at the time. As highlighted by Henry Pelling, its early membership consisted 'to a remarkable degree, of persons of non-English origin',[5] including those from 'the Celtic fringe'.[6] A number of its leading members were of Irish heritage, including Arthur McManus, Willie Gallacher and J.T. Murphy.[7] There were also others who, though with no such heritage, nevertheless took a keen interest in Irish affairs. The South Wales miners' leader Arthur Horner escaped to Dublin in 1918 to avoid conscription and served with the socialist Irish Citizen Army (ICA).[8] William Paul, Ralph Fox and the prolific T.A. Jackson wrote about the Irish struggle with a genuine interest in understanding its complexities from the perspective of the Irish themselves.[9] On the whole, however, these were exceptional. For Irish revolutionaries, the CPGB supported the correct positions—unconditional self-determination for the Irish, no partition of Ireland, and opposition to the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty. However, it had its limitations, especially following words with deeds. This did not go unnoticed. Speaking in Moscow at the Second Congress of the Comintern in July 1920, a leading member of the Bolsheviks, Karl Radek, proclaimed that 'The International will not judge the British comrades by the articles that they write in the *Call* or the *Workers' Dreadnought*, but by the number of comrades who are

thrown into gaol for agitating in the colonial countries.' It was 'the duty' of British communists, said Radek, 'to help the Irish movement with all their strength', including agitation amongst the British troops and stopping British unions from allowing the shipment of troops to Ireland. Most bitingly, he added, 'It is very easy at the moment to speak out in Britain against intervention in Russia, since even the bourgeois left is against it. It is harder for the British comrades to take up the cause of Irish independence and of anti-militarist activity. We have a right to demand this difficult work of the British comrades.'[10]

With the formation of the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) in 1921, the Comintern tasked the CPGB with providing assistance to their Irish comrades, a role it would continue to play to various extents until the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943. This role also extended to other countries in the Empire such as India and was later formalised through the creation of a 'Colonial Department' within the CPGB.[11] CPGB members regularly visited Ireland over the years. Most, such as Willie Gallacher, Tom Mann, Harry Pollitt, Arthur McManus, T.A. Jackson, Shapurji Saklatvala, William Rust and Helen Crawfurd, usually travelled to attend a few meetings. Others, namely Tom Bell, Pat Devine and particularly Robert (Bob) Stewart, stayed for considerable lengths of time to assist the Irish section. While the CPGB remained a coherent organisation throughout, the Irish section of the Comintern underwent four incarnations: the CPI (1921–24), Irish Worker League (1924–29), Revolutionary Workers' Groups (1930–33) and the second CPI (1933–1943). The relationship between the Comintern in Moscow and its various national sections was of central importance to the development of Marxist parties at this time. Although there was some room for manoeuvre based on local conditions, the Comintern provided information, finance, personnel and directives on the 'correct line' to follow. Recent scholarship has added nuance to this, by investigating how the Comintern operated through 'hubs' such as London or New York, and put pressure on its sections to agitate amongst oppressed minorities within their own countries and in the colonial/semi-colonial world. This added a further layer to the dynamics between centre/periphery, and one which could be laden with additional tension due to how this often operated in practice through an imperial metropole/colony axis.[12] This article contributes to that scholarship by investigating the relationship

between the CPGB and the Irish sections of the Comintern and highlights the potential for a future, more holistic study of the CPGB and Ireland.

Historiography

The historiography of British communism is substantial, but there are surprisingly few references to Ireland throughout.[13] The historiography of Irish communism, on the contrary, is still in its infancy, although it has grown considerably in recent years. There are three general histories of Irish communism, an increasing number of biographies of Irish communists, and numerous works which partially touch on the topic.[14] The relationship between British and Irish sections of the Comintern is often noted in these, but analysis of this is rare. Mike Milotte's pioneering *Communism in Modern Ireland* (1984) observed that the 'note of discord' between British and Irish delegates at the aforementioned Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920 'remained a feature of British/Irish communist relations long into the future.' For Milotte, at this point, 'The Irish communists, perhaps because of their familiarity with armed subversion, had little respect for what they perceived as the legalistic and moderate approach of the British communists, who in turn had as little regard for their Irish comrades, preferring the political company of the official labour leaders, whom they took for genuine revolutionaries.'[15] Although Milotte's book references this relationship as it unfolded in subsequent decades, he does not develop this analysis. Of the others, it is the work of Emmet O'Connor, particularly his book *Reds and the Green* (2004), which sets the bar for studies of Irish communism. O'Connor was the first to make comprehensive use of Comintern documents located in Moscow, which provide an indispensable resource for an understanding of Irish communist organisations and their relationship with Moscow and London. Copies of the documents related to Ireland were deposited at Queen's University Belfast by O'Connor and Barry McLoughlin, and it is from these that much of this article is based.[16] *Reds and the Green* provides extensive detail on the relationship of the CPGB with its Irish comrades in the period covered in this article. While acknowledging the 'sterling service' of British communists that travelled to assist the Irish communists, O'Connor concludes that 'the British party invariably regarded Irish communists as subordinate to its own interests in Britain, or its agenda on Ireland. The

CPGB was never convinced of the merit of an Irish communist party, believing that resources might be better deployed in a broad workers' party, in the Labour Party, or even in Fianna Fáil.'[17]

This article builds on O'Connor's argument, and suggests that the CPGB's relationship with Irish communists was reflective of an underlying *mentalité* influenced by its position in the heart of the British Empire. As professed internationalists the members of the CPGB were, in theory, working in solidarity with their Irish comrades. However, the authority invested in representatives of the CPGB by the Comintern, as well as its stability and the greater experience of its membership, led to an imbalance in relations between the British and Irish communists. This was exacerbated by the history of the two islands. Both sections believed in world revolution, but one was based in the imperial metropole, the other in a partitioned and semi-colonial country which was engaged in an anti-imperialist struggle against the other. Relations between the two were often strained, with leading Irish communist Jim Larkin going so far as to accuse the CPGB as being 'imperialist' in its dealings with other sections of the Comintern.[18] This article investigates the relationship between the British and Irish sections of the Comintern—largely from the perspective of the Irish—and concludes that, although Larkin's accusation was hyperbolic, it was not without merit. Notwithstanding the selfless work of some British communists in providing assistance to their Irish comrades, the CPGB on the whole exhibited a patronising and paternalistic demeanour towards the Irish that failed to consider the latter's perspective on an equal footing to its own, even in regard to their own affairs. This attitude, combined with its position within the heart of the British Empire, is indicative of 'cultural imperialism'.

Revolution in Ireland

From 1912 to 1923, Ireland underwent a process of revolutionary upheaval which is sometimes characterised outright as 'The Irish Revolution'.[19] Although the issue of 'Home Rule' within the United Kingdom dominated Irish politics before the outbreak of war in 1914, this changed dramatically with the Easter Rising of 1916 which proclaimed an independent Irish republic. The Rising was brutally suppressed by British force, with its leaders executed and thousands arrested, including many who had not

partaken in the Rising. But a new spirit stalked the land after 1916. The hitherto disparate 'advanced nationalists' in Ireland united in a reformed Sinn Féin in 1917 standing on a platform of full independence for Ireland. In the December 1918 general election, Sinn Féin won a landslide. Its MPs refused to take their seats at Westminster and, in January 1919, established their own parliament in Dublin, Dáil Éireann, with its own state apparatus including ministries and courts. Simultaneously, the prime paramilitary force in the Rising, the Irish Volunteers—soon rebranded as the Irish Republican Army (IRA)—launched a guerrilla campaign against Crown Forces in Ireland. This War of Independence escalated until a truce was declared in July 1921 and the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in December 1921.

The labour movement played a pivotal role throughout. Its chief theoretician and leader, James Connolly, was one of seven signatories of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic, which was printed in the basement of Liberty Hall, headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU). At a time when socialists throughout Europe scorned 'nationalism' as 'bourgeois' and of no benefit to workers, Connolly, on the contrary, drew the distinction between the nationalism of the oppressed and the nationalism of the oppressor and eloquently argued that the national and social revolution should be combined.[20] It was thus that he led his socialist Irish Citizen Army into the GPO alongside the nationalist Irish Volunteers in 1916, which led ultimately to his execution. Over the coming years, however, the labour movement grew to unprecedented proportions, from 100,000 in 1917 to 250,000 in 1920, and workers took advantage of the collapse of the British state in Ireland to occupy land and workplaces, flying the red flag over their self-declared 'soviets'. It launched a successful general strike against the threat of conscription in April 1918, another on May Day 1919 as a gesture of international workers' solidarity, and yet another in April 1920 for the release of political prisoners. But if labour used its industrial might to advance the cause of independence, it was less effective as a political force in its own right. A Labour Party had been created in 1912 at the instigation of Connolly, but it had no existence independent of the trade union movement and did not field candidates in the 1918 or 1921 general elections.[21]

Connolly's pre-war Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI) was revitalised by his successor at the head of the ITGWU, William O'Brien, in 1917.[22] It

comprised many of the leading figures of the labour movement, such as O'Brien, Cathal O'Shannon and Tom Johnson, and its office was located at its heart in Liberty Hall. Despite being 'the best connected, best resourced Marxist party in Irish history',[23] it remained miniscule and did not make any serious attempt to organise branches or step into politics as a force in its own right, its role being primarily educational and propagandist. The most noteworthy exception to this was its attendance at the Berne congress in February 1919 which attempted to re-start the Second International. The Irish delegation consisted of Johnson and O'Shannon, representing Labour and the SPI. In what was a major coup, they persuaded the congress to grant recognition for Irish self-determination and the opening of peace talks. The SPI was enthusiastic about the Russian Revolution, and sought links with the CPGB and the Comintern, but it was far from a 'Bolshevik' party. Its attendance at the Berne conference was anathema to the Russian communists, for instance. Some members, however, were determined to use it as a vehicle for launching a Communist Party.

The Communist Party of Ireland

In the summer of 1920, two Irish communists attended the Second Congress of the Comintern in Russia, Éadhmonn MacAlpine and Roddy Connolly, the 19-year-old son of James Connolly and himself a veteran of the Rising. Over the ensuing year, the SPI crumbled, victim both to British repression and to the competing priorities of its leading members. Connolly attended the Third Congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1921, where he met Lenin, and returned to Ireland re-energised.[24] The SPI had been revived that summer, and in September 1921, Connolly and other communists took the majority of positions on its executive and quickly set about its transformation. They launched a newspaper, the *Workers' Republic*, and in October voted to apply for affiliation to the Comintern. The 21 conditions necessary for affiliation aimed to make a decisive break with 'reformism' and create a party of revolutionaries committed to the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Accordingly, the new executive of the SPI expelled Cathal O'Shannon and William O'Brien for 'reformist activity and breaches of party discipline'[25] and wrote a new constitution which renamed the SPI as the Communist Party of Ireland, committed to establishing a 'Workers' Republic' controlled by 'the workers and toilers of Ireland

organised in Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Councils'.[26] Their application was accepted on 10 January 1922.[27] From the beginning, the CPI attempted to establish relations with the CPGB. Roddy Connolly wrote several articles for the CPGB's weekly paper, *The Communist*, and the CPI forwarded reports and its application for affiliation to the Comintern through the CPGB.[28] Later, the CPGB helped produce the *Workers' Republic* in London when the Civil War made it difficult to do so in Ireland.[29] For the most part, however, relations between the two were strained, with the CPI making numerous complaints to the Comintern regarding its sister party. Many of these centred on its propensity to take action regarding Ireland without first consulting the CPI. For instance, in October 1921, Connolly had criticised O'Brien and O'Shannon in his article in *The Communist*. In the next issue, claiming to have received a number of complaints, the editor issued an unreserved apology, and Connolly was dropped as a correspondent.[30] Shortly after, according to Connolly and another prominent member, George McLay (real name George Pollock), the CPGB admitted into its ranks a number of suspended members of the CPI, despite protestations from the latter.[31] As these two incidents took place before the CPI was formally admitted to the Comintern, however, they can be passed off as merely rude, rather than an infringement on the discipline of a sister organisation. In May 1922, however, *The Communist* published articles by another suspended member of the CPI, Liam O'Flaherty, without seeking their advice. The articles ceased when a letter of protest was sent to the CPGB and the Comintern,[32] although the CPGB seemingly never replied directly to the CPI's complaint nor issued an apology as requested.[33] Furthermore, the CPI complained about persistent difficulties in communicating with Moscow, which was done through the CPGB.[34] Letters sent from Moscow suggest that the Irish messages had been received, though the Comintern's replies had not.[35] It is not possible to determine whether the CPGB was responsible for this, although the CPI seemed to think so.[36] Relations improved for a time when the Comintern stepped in during the summer of 1922,[37] although it is noteworthy that complaints regarding communication would frequently recur between the CPGB and future incarnations of the Comintern's Irish affiliate. Despite this, however, the CPGB was extremely doubtful about the ability of the CPI to build a base in Ireland and continued to manoeuvre behind its back.

The struggle in Ireland entered a new phase with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, which granted dominion status within the British Empire to a newly created 26-county Irish Free State, with self-government over most issues within its territory. Representatives to Dáil Éireann, however, would have to swear an Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown. The Treaty also solidified the 1920 Government of Ireland Act which had partitioned the island, with the six north-eastern counties to be known as Northern Ireland granted devolved powers within the United Kingdom. Although the Treaty was narrowly passed by the Dáil, it was done so with the threat of renewed war by Britain hovering in the background. Significantly, the majority of the IRA had rejected it. On 28 June 1922, matters came to a head when the army of the provisional government shelled the headquarters of the anti-Treaty IRA ensconced in the Four Courts in Dublin, beginning the Civil War. Willie Gallacher would later claim that, 'through a thoroughly trustworthy source', the CPGB had been informed of the signing of the Treaty before it was made public, whereupon Gallacher had immediately travelled to Dublin and met with leading republicans, encouraging them to arrest the signatories on their return.[38] The CPI opposed the Treaty from the beginning.[39] This, coupled with Labour's de facto acceptance of the Treaty, potentially placed them in a good position for gaining influence and membership amongst anti-Treaty republicans.[40] In July 1922, Connolly and McLay met in London with Mikhail Borodin from the Comintern and, together with the CPGB, drafted a social programme to discuss with the IRA.[41] Connolly and another CPI member, Seán McLoughlin, then visited the IRA's headquarters in Fermoy, County Cork later that month.[42] Soon after, J.T. Murphy and Arthur McManus of the CPGB met with prominent republicans in Dublin.[43] Although they found them receptive to their programme, with members of the IRA, the women's movement, and transport workers expressing 'a willingness to be members […] the majority expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the present conduct of affairs within the I.C.P. [Irish Communist Party]'. They suggested that it was 'due mainly to our personal influence' that they were considering joining and argued for 'a most thorough authoritative investigation into the Party affairs' by the Comintern, strongly hinting that the CPI might need to be dissolved to avail of 'the greatness of the opportunity' presented.[44] By the end of the year, however, it had come to nought. The republicans had been routed in the

war, with defeat but a matter of time. In 1923, the CPI, always small and prone to faction-fighting, proceeded to tear itself apart. After three of the five-person Central Committee resigned on 1 October,[45] McManus went to investigate and sent a report to Moscow which sounded the death knell for the party.[46] He reported that the CPI was composed of 'quarrelling factions', with fewer than 50 members. Four members, including two leading members, had taken jobs as paid organisers for Sinn Féin.[47] McManus concluded 'that not only in the interests of the Communist International and the revolutionary movement of Ireland, but even in the interests of those comrades who have got the metal to become good Party workers, that the present Party should be liquidated.'[48] This recommendation was endorsed unanimously by the Central Committee of the CPGB.[49] Crushed by debt and faction-fighting, and now without the support of the Comintern or the CPGB, the CPI voted in January 1924 to dissolve itself.[50]

Unbeknownst to the CPI, however, was the centrality of Jim Larkin to the CPGB's machinations. Larkin had founded the ITGWU in December 1908 and quickly gained a large and devoted following amongst the working class of Dublin. He departed for the United States in October 1914, became a founder of the Communist Labor Party in September 1919, and was arrested on the charge of 'criminal anarchy' in November. Upon his release, he was deported to Ireland, arriving in Dublin in April 1923.[51] The Comintern invested large hope in Larkin. He made it clear to McManus, however, that he advocated the liquidation of the CPI and for the Comintern to work with his own organisation, the Irish Worker League (IWL).[52] Although members of the CPGB had their doubts about Larkin,[53] he represented something more substantial than the tiny CPI. The CPGB aimed to work with Larkin in the hope of 'co-ordinating all the militant and oppositional forces that exist in the working class movement in Ireland and cementing these into a real organisation'.[54] Larkin had other plans.

Jim Larkin and the Irish Worker League

After the experience of the CPI, the CPGB voiced its opinion to the Comintern that what Ireland needed was a broad Workers' Party, rather than a small Communist Party. It further claimed that Larkin was in agreement with the idea and had indicated his approval for the IWL to be used as an 'instrument' for its creation.[55] In April 1924, Larkin seemed to indicate his assent by organising the first conference of the IWL transforming it from a loose idea into an organisation with a constitution, an executive, and a dues-paying membership.[56] Progress was put on hold, however, when the Comintern finally managed to woo Larkin to Moscow for its Fifth Congress in June 1924.[57] While there, changes took place which would transform his position.

After his return from the United States the previous year, Larkin had become embroiled in a bitter dispute with officials of the ITGWU over control of the union, which resulted first in his suspension as general secretary, followed by his expulsion in March 1924.[58] To bolster and propagandise his position, Larkin had revived his paper, the *Irish Worker*, on 15 June 1923 and formed the IWL in September 1923.[59] The dispute reached a new level during Larkin's absence in Moscow, when his brother Peter, and his son, Jim Larkin Jr, launched a new union, the Workers' Union of Ireland (WUI). It quickly tore the labour movement apart in Dublin, with 16,000 members of the ITGWU defecting, although its impact was limited elsewhere. Upon his return, Larkin found himself general secretary of a new union involved in a number of costly strikes, mostly regarding demarcation disputes with the ITGWU.[60] By the end of the year, he had made no progress with the formation of a Workers' Party. In December, Peter Larkin travelled to Moscow to engage in a commission, which finally reached an agreement the following month. The WUI would join the communist Red International of Labour Unions (RILU or Profintern) and hold a conference to formalise its organisation by May. Once this was done, a further conference was to be organised to re-form the IWL as a Workers' Party. The commission also resolved a problem raised both by Larkin and the CPI before him—the difficulties encountered by the Irish in communications with Moscow through the medium of the CPGB. The Irish would now have their own permanent representative in Moscow, and representatives of the

Comintern and Profintern were also to be sent to Ireland. Furthermore, Irish and British communists would co-ordinate with each other when undertaking activities in either country. Unlike the CPI, the IWL had a few branches in Britain, and so this was not all one way as before. Both sections would also fight for the withdrawal of British unions from Ireland.[61] Despite the resolution, however, Larkin would repeatedly clash with the CPGB on every point over the coming years.

As with the CPI, the CPGB was tasked by the Comintern with helping the IWL develop a base for communism in Ireland. Scotsman Bob Stewart was duly sent to Dublin in January 1925, lodging with the Larkin family while there.[62] Stewart immediately embarked on a flurry of activity, breathing new life into the decrepit communist movement in Ireland. This included organising branches of the Communist-inspired Workers' International Relief (WIR) and International Class War Prisoners' Aid (ICWPA) to channel funds for famine relief to Ireland and assist the dependents of political prisoners, thus hoping to raise the profile of the Comintern in Ireland. Despite some initial success, however, both had collapsed by the end of the year, victims of Larkin's temperament and his infamous ability to make enemies out of friends in the labour movement.[63] Stewart's preparations for the launch of a party similarly failed on account of Larkin. Despite having prepared a manifesto and agreed 24 May as the date for the launch, when it came to the crunch, Larkin declined to sign the document. Although hundreds attended, Stewart thought the creation of a party could not proceed without Larkin's acceptance.[64] The scenario repeated itself in October; Stewart organised a conference, Larkin failed to show.[65] Given Stewart's good work, Larkin could not scapegoat the CPGB for failures of his own making. There was one issue, however, which he had good reason to take them to task over, that of their position regarding the existence of British unions in Ireland.

With the creation of the ITGWU, Larkin had signalled his open hostility to the operation of British unions in Ireland, believing they could not properly represent the interests of Irish workers. This position was given renewed impetus with the formation of the WUI, to which Larkin hoped to attract former members of British unions and avoid further clashes with the ITGWU. Harry Pollitt, a leading member of the CPGB, however, put the interests of his own party above those of the Irish on the issue, despite the

instructions of the Comintern. As secretary of the British Minority Movement, a militant rank-and-file tendency within the unions, he ignored the January 1925 resolution and did not advance the withdrawal of British unions from Ireland within its structures due to the difficulties it might cause for the party in Britain.[66] Larkin subsequently attacked the Minority Movement at its conference in August.[67]

The situation remained much the same when Larkin returned to Moscow in December 1926. At the Presidium of the Comintern, he vociferously attacked the CPGB, arguing that the Irish had been 'boycotted in all our struggles'.[68] He claimed that when his union was involved in 'a very serious industrial dispute' in June 1925, the CPGB papers 'absolutely ignored us'.[69] His complaints went on: the CPGB were unhelpful when he approached them for assistance in getting to Moscow;[70] they failed to inform him about the opening of the Plenum of the Comintern;[71] Irish letters to Moscow had not been delivered;[72] and money allocated for Ireland from Moscow had not been received.[73] Overall, Larkin alleged that 'There is a decided anti-Irish atmosphere in the British Party'.[74] He insisted that from now on, 'we will have no intermediary' between Ireland and the Comintern.[75] As Larkin admitted to Willie Gallacher in 1925, he had been allowed to go through the archive on a previous visit to Moscow and knew what the CPGB said about him in their reports.[76] For Larkin, their entire attitude was indicative of something more damning than mere forgetfulness, the nub of which was this: 'the British Party is today just as imperialistic as our masters.'[77] He admitted that although some of the work done by the CPGB had been 'very good',

> […] everyone in England thinks he is a Lenin unto himself. I want to assure you that the condition of the Party in Great Britain is due to this imperialist point of view—that the British Party still feels they must control the work of the Communist Parties in the countries which come under the sphere of the Empire. They think they can do the work of South Africa, Australia, Japan, Ireland, and they cannot do the work of England, Scotland and Wales. I want to assure them that Irish labour will not be dictated to by England or by the English movement and that we will insist upon this in the Commission.[78]

A 'Comrade Smith' from the CPGB replied,[79] saying that the CPGB would be 'very glad' for Larkin's 'accusations' to be 'gone into very thoroughly in a Commission'. They were prepared to correct their mistakes, but regarding accusations about their 'imperialism', he countered that they should

examine the CPGB material produced over the previous 18 months in relation to China and 'the Bombay textile strike'.[80] Smith then struck Larkin in his weak spot—his continued stalling on the formation of a Workers' Party in Ireland. Larkin had not acknowledged the assistance Stewart had given, nor that he had withdrawn from the conference to launch the party a week before it was due to be held, 'and in fact caused that Conference to fail'.[81] The result of this, Smith argued, was that 'while there may be an imperialist and very bad Communist Party in Great Britain, nevertheless the Party has 12,000 members while the Irish party has not even 12.'[82] Since the breakdown of relations with Larkin, the CPGB had 'cleared out of Ireland absolutely with the object of letting the revolutionary elements who could not brook our assistance, or interference—let them show what they can do by themselves.'[83] Another British delegate, J.T. Murphy, subsequently contended that he could 'answer all the accusations' of Larkin, but, added knowingly, 'I think the Presidium has sufficient measure of the line of Larkin and therefore I will not enter into any arguments.'[84]

The Comintern may have had the measure of Larkin, but they were not prepared to give up on him just yet. Its resolution gave him the benefit of the doubt,[85] assigning blame for the difficulties on objective circumstances:

> The struggles for independence carried on by the Irish people against the British imperialism have left their mark on the relations between the revolutionary labour movement of Ireland and the Communist Party of Great Britain. A number of misunderstandings and conflicts have arisen between the CP of Great Britain and the IWL. The CI [Communist International] does not deem it necessary to make a minute investigation as to the party most responsible for this. Failure to fully understand the feelings of independence existing in the labour movement of oppressed countries on the part of the Party of the metropolis, a frequently exaggerated distrust on the part of the labour movement of oppressed countries with regard to the party of the Metropolis,—such are the general causes of the conflicts and misunderstandings.[86]

Having chastised its British section for the sake of Larkin, it also made clear that he now had to deliver. The IWL, the Comintern instructed, 'must hasten its transformation into a real Party with the organisation [*sic*] programme and activity of a Communist Party according to the directions which have already been laid down on this subject by the CI [Communist International].'[87]

For its part, the CPGB contacted Larkin soon after saying they abided by the resolution of the Comintern, were preparing a list of their members in Ireland with a view to them joining the IWL, and they 'shall always be glad to receive any suggestions you may wish to make as to co-operation between the two bodies.'[88] Larkin put in the appearance of work for a time. The IWL stood three candidates in the September 1927 general election, with Larkin himself winning a seat. However, his bankruptcy precluded him from taking it up.[89] The Comintern were nonetheless delighted and, seeing the potential, pushed him again to form a Workers' Party.[90] Larkin continued to drag his heels. At the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) Plenum in February 1928, he again attacked the CPGB, going over well-trodden ground by reiterating points made about the CPGB's lack of solidarity with striking miners in Britain in 1926, and about the lack of active support from the British party for the withdrawal of British unions from Ireland.[91] J.R. Campbell's exacerbated response served only to add fuel to Larkin's fire.[92] Larkin delivered a blistering but rambling speech a few days later in which he launched personalised attacks on Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, the Irish Labour Party and, most of all, the CPGB.[93] He claimed there had been 'intrigue' between the members of the CPI and the CPGB since the former had been liquidated and blamed the CPGB for passing on Comintern documents to them.[94] He then repeated accusations about the CPGB abandoning the miners, and the lack of material in the CPGB press about Irish affairs,[95] or else its inaccuracy. He claimed that during the 1927 election campaign, the line of the IWL's manifesto had been changed 'without our knowledge' in an article which featured in the CPGB's *Workers' Life*.[96] Larkin concluded by focusing on the alleged treatment of a recent Irish delegation to Moscow to celebrate the anniversary of the 1917 revolution. According to Larkin, the Irish had to go below deck when they boarded ship at London as the British comrades had taken all the cabins. Over the course of the trip, fumed Larkin, 'They were handled more like dogs than people by the English comrades!'[97]

By now, however, the Comintern had enough of Larkin. They knew he was not going to build a party, and so they set out to develop a disciplined communist force in Ireland without him. While the substance of the criticisms levelled at the CPGB by the CPI and Larkin could arguably be put down to inexperience and egoism, respectively, those in the next period

cannot be so easily dismissed. Now there would be real Moscow-trained Irish ‘Bolsheviks’, ready and willing to follow the line.

The Revolutionary Workers’ Groups

Tom Bell and Bob Stewart of the CPGB were dispatched to Ireland at the end of 1929 to begin the process of creating a new ‘Bolshevised’ Communist Party.[98] By March 1930, they had built a base consisting of small groups in Belfast and Dublin, and individuals scattered throughout the country. According to Bell and Stewart, most had not been involved in the IWL, but rather were present or former members of the IRA. The two argued that it was ‘necessary to come out as a CP openly’, but the membership was worried this could lead to attacks from the Church, state and trade unions.[99] The latter won out, with the new organisation being named the ‘Revolutionary Workers’ Groups’ (RWG), headed by a National Secretariat consisting of Stewart and two loyal graduates of the cadre-training International Lenin School in Moscow, Jim Larkin Jr and former IRA member, Seán Murray.[100] However, continuing pressure would lead to the organisation being renamed as the Communist Party of Ireland in June 1933.

In early 1931, differences arose between the members and the leadership in Belfast,[101] which, in turn, resulted in a telling incident involving the CPGB’s Secretariat. Harry Pollitt, general secretary of the CPGB since 1929, had been due to speak in Belfast to help the group meet ‘greater masses of people’. In the meantime, however, the Belfast group had refused to work with the Secretariat in Ireland, and so Stewart organised a new group. The RWG felt it ‘inadvisable’ for Pollitt to speak ‘under the auspices of the seceding group as it would have been equivalent to using the British Party against the leadership in Ireland and would have made our work even more difficult.’ The British Secretariat initially agreed and cancelled the engagement. However, a week before the meeting was due to take place, the British Secretariat changed their mind, as they felt ‘his intervention might lead to a healing of the breach.’ The Irish protested, and eventually the CPGB backed down since ‘we [the RWG] had full responsibility for the work in Ireland.’ There is a suggestion that the CPGB had been influenced by a word from Moscow in this regard.[102] Despite repeated declarations

over the years, the CPGB still seemingly required a rebuttal from Moscow to stop them interfering in Irish affairs.

Unlike the leadership of the CPGB in general, however, Stewart was a positive influence, and, rather than adopting an overly paternalistic attitude, he was sensitive to the requirements and independence of the Irish.[103] In May 1931, he sent a report to leading CPGB member Robin Page Arnot in Moscow, in which he pleaded for them to take more interest in Ireland. He reported that, although the work was going well, they were hampered due to a lack of finance, which had for a time resulted in the non-appearance of their paper, the *Workers' Voice*. He further argued for the independence of the work in Ireland:

> We think that our comrades may be losing sight of the political importance of this country and it may be valuable to suggest a commission to go into it again because unless the political implications are taken thoroughly into account we may continue to be treated as a kind of sub-district of the British Party. […] It will be tragic Robin if we make another debacle in Ireland especially when we are really working like hell and getting some influence and results.[104]

In August 1932, the Comintern made one of its sharpest rebukes to the CPGB regarding its position on Ireland. Following the general election in February, Éamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil had emerged as the largest party in Dáil Éireann and duly formed a government, the first to develop from the defeated side in the Civil War. Having arisen as a split from Sinn Féin in 1926, Fianna Fáil's combination of economic nationalism with a degree of social radicalism appealed to small farmer and worker alike and led to their rapid growth to become the hegemonic force in Irish politics. For some time previously, communists had been circumspect about de Valera, suggesting he was not much different from his predecessor William Cosgrave and his party of government, Cumann na nGaedheal. However, de Valera quickly initiated policies to gain more sovereignty for the Irish Free State. His refusal to hand over land annuities to Britain—a tax imposed on Irish tenants to buy out the land from British landowners—led to confrontation, and Britain retaliated by increasing tariffs on Irish imports. De Valera followed suit, beginning what became known as 'the economic war'. Although the Comintern was caught off guard by this, it disingenuously attacked the CPGB for its position. Regarding the 'economic reprisals' on Ireland by the British government, it suggested that the CPGB 'has the task

of mobilising the widest masses in support of the anti-imperialist movement in Ireland.' Continuing, it argued that:

> The CPGB must wage a relentless fight for the full right of self-determination for Ireland, against the attempts of the British bourgeoisie to exact payment of the Land Annuities, to force the retention of the Oath to the English King on the Irish people and to force the Free State to capitulate.
>
> The main task of the British Party in this respect is to expose the role of British imperialism and to organise the greatest possible opposition to the coercive measures of British capitalism against the Irish masses.[105]

According to the Comintern, the CPGB's newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, had 'made serious errors', as 'the whole force of the attack is directed against De Valera, completely glossing over the attitude of the imperialists.' Although this had been corrected in the editorial of 13 April 1932, with the main attack now being against the British National Government, they still failed to give 'any concrete directions as to the means to be adopted to organise the fight against the imperialists.' Its most serious criticism was saved for an article in the issue of 25 June 1932 which stated that 'The squabbles of Irish capitalism and British imperialism are not important in the form they take […] for the British and Irish workers the enemy is the same […] capitalism. It is against capitalism that the workers must realise a United Front.' For the Comintern,

> This vulgar distortion of the position, which entirely denies the national struggle, is indicative of a deep-rooted misunderstanding among class conscious workers in Britain of the national question in general and particularly in regard to Ireland, which only a thorough application of the CI [Communist International] line in practice by the Party will eradicate.

The CPGB had failed to provide a 'lead' in mobilising 'forces for protest action' against 'British imperialism', not only in the *Daily Worker*, but also in bodies such as the trade unions and unemployed councils. Although the CPGB 'has recently given much attention to the question of Ireland', this had taken a top-down approach 'without any attempt to rally the entire membership of the Party to this task'.[106]

While the criticisms of the Comintern had merit, it was not entirely without blame. In January 1932, before the victory of Fianna Fáil, the Anglo-American Secretariat of the ECCI sent a letter to the Irish section saying that where there were no communist candidates, people should be

encouraged to spoil their ballots with slogans such as ‘Down with British Imperialism and their Irish agents, Cosgrave, De Valera’.[107] The line had changed since the initiation of the economic war with Britain, and arguably the CPGB could claim to have been merely slow in its uptake. However, its attitude was not a once-off but was indicative of a trend which would reach its apogee in the coming years in its relationship with the reformed CPI.

A new Communist Party

In June 1933, the RWG held a conference in Dublin to launch the new CPI. By this stage, the leadership of Irish communism was in Irish hands, built in particular around the figure of Seán Murray, general secretary.[108] Despite a more reliable membership, the 1930s were difficult years for Irish communism. It came under sustained assault from the Catholic Church, with repeated physical confrontation at communist street meetings and demonstrations. The most dramatic instance of this was in March 1933 when Connolly House, the headquarters of the RWG, was besieged for three days and eventually burned-out by a mob inspired by a sermon at the pro-Cathedral. However, there was also reason for optimism, as the left wing of the IRA grew closer to the communists.

For years, the left of the IRA around Peadar O’Donnell, George Gilmore, Frank Ryan and Michael Price had been arguing that it needed to move beyond a purely military strategy and engage with issues that were of immediate relevance to people such as land annuities and industrial unrest.[109] An initial advance had been made in 1931 with the creation of a political organisation, Saor Éire, which was soon abandoned due to a ‘red scare’ from both Church and state. Subsequent attempts to reform the IRA from within failed, and at its army convention in March 1934, much of the left walked out.[110] At a conference in Athlone on the 7–8 April, they issued a manifesto proclaiming the creation of Republican Congress with the call ‘We believe that a Republic of a united Ireland will never be achieved except through a struggle which uproots Capitalism on its way.’[111] Over the summer of 1934, it quickly gained a base of support, with branches formed throughout the country, a weekly paper, the creation of tenant leagues to combat slum conditions in Dublin, support for picketing workers, and through developing links with a re-vitalised ICA. Famously, it also seemed to succeed where other republican groups had not, bridging the sectarian

divide in Belfast by attracting people from the predominantly Protestant Shankill Road. Nevertheless, major issues arose at its inaugural conference held on 29–30 September 1934.

The conference was attended by 186 delegates representing Congress branches, 16 trade union branches and trades councils, the Northern Ireland Socialist Party, the Labour Party, the Kerry-based Republican Labour Party, the CPI, the ICA, the Labour League Against Fascism, the Irish National Unemployed Movement, the tenant leagues and others.[112] However, a serious rift emerged over the form and demands of the new organisation. A majority of the organising bureau including Roddy Connolly, his sister Nora Connolly O'Brien, and Michael Price, forwarded a resolution calling for the formation of a Workers' Republic as the objective of Republican Congress. Similarly, the majority, minus Roddy Connolly, favoured the creation of a new political party to struggle for that goal. The minority position supported by George Gilmore, Peadar O'Donnell and Frank Ryan proposed that Congress should have as its aim 'the Republic' and that it should maintain its stance as a united front organisation rather than form a new party.[113] The CPI, as the largest group, held the decisive position.

The Communists had been trying to win over left republicans for years. They had engaged with Saor Éire and the IRA but were banned from membership of the latter in 1933. However, while viewing the move left as positive, they wanted republicans to join the CPI, not form a new, rival party. Its response to the Athlone manifesto declared that: 'A political party is the leadership of a class. There can be only one correct leadership and policy for the working class—the revolutionary Marxism of the Communist International and the Communist Party.'[114] Republican Congress, then, was a delicate matter. On 16 September, the Comintern drafted instructions to the CPI regarding the position it should advance at the founding conference. Congress should be a 'united front' of workers, farmers and agricultural labourers, advocating a 'Workers' and Farmers' Republic', as opposed to the republican slogan of 'Irish Republic'.[115] Harry Pollitt was supposed to relay the message but had already dispatched Willie Gallacher to argue against a new political party, the details on Republic versus Workers' Republic remaining unclear, and no attempt was made to correct the line.[116] In the event, Seán Murray of the CPI took a two-stage approach, arguing for unification of Ireland under a Republic as a prerequisite to achieving

socialism: ‘I would state the position to be the very opposite to what Michael Price says. He said you cannot get rid of British Imperialism until you smash Capitalism. I say you cannot smash Capitalism until you get rid of British Imperialism.’[117] Nora Connolly O’Brien also alleged that O’Donnell was won to this position after speaking with Gallacher.[118] In the end, the call for a Republic was adopted by 99 votes to 84.[119] The intensity behind each position caused what had been a promising organisation to split, with Nora Connolly O’Brien and Michael Price leading a defeated section out of its ranks. The Comintern was fuming, saying the situation now facing the CPI was one of ‘extreme gravity’, having effectively ‘liquidated’ the independent position of the party behind O’Donnell’s wing.[120] Pat Devine of the CPGB was seconded to oversee the work in Ireland, effectively ending the brief few years of independent Irish leadership. This was not the last time that Pollitt showed his disregard for the Irish section.

In September 1935, Murray complained to the Anglo-American Secretariat about a long-recurring theme, that is, communications with Moscow. Murray wanted Peadar O’Donnell invited to Moscow, but Pollitt was opposed to it. Murray received no reply to his letter, whereas Pollitt did, even though his letter had accompanied Murray’s. Murray stressed that it would be good if ‘our Party’ received a reply and that in future, ‘we receive direct communication on matters relating to Irish affairs.’[121] Pollitt, however, had no faith in Murray’s ability to lead the Irish party. He visited Dublin in January 1936 and, based on his observations, felt that the potential for growth was better now than on his last visit two years previously. The main issue was the leadership, which called for ‘very serious consideration’.[122] New leadership was not forthcoming, however. Murray struggled on, and the CPI continued to regress under renewed anti-communist attacks during the Spanish Civil War. At a meeting of the CPGB’s Central Committee in 1938, Rajani Palme Dutt suggested that with 200 members, the CPI had little impact by itself and might perform better within the Labour Party. Pollitt was less diplomatic, saying that he and Willie Gallacher thought the party should be liquidated, but that this was not possible at the time. Murray was also present and, although in a weak position, argued his case.[123] It merely delayed the death sentence. Soon

after, he was dropped from the Comintern's payroll. The CPI hobbled on until dealt a crippling blow in 1941.

In 1939 the CPI, following the line from Moscow, denounced the Second World War as a conflict between two rival imperialist camps. This chimed with Éire's neutrality, but not that of Northern Ireland, which, as part of the United Kingdom, was actively involved in the war. The line changed again following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. The UK was now an ally in a war against fascism. This was too much for the CPI. Feeling that a pro-war line would prove difficult in strongly neutral Éire, the Dublin branch—the only one remaining in the state—voted 11–9 on 10 July 'to suspend independent activity and to apply the forces of the Branch to working in the Labour and trade union organisations in order to carry forward the fight against the heavy attacks now being launched against the workers.'[124] The CPI continued in Northern Ireland, rapidly gaining membership and influence over the course of the war, but in the South at least, Pollitt had got his wish.

Conclusion

Relations between the Irish and British sections of the Comintern were strained throughout their history. The CPGB provided useful and occasionally vital assistance to the Irish over the years, and it is difficult to imagine the Irish maintaining their various organisations without it. The selfless and often thankless work of Bob Stewart in particular deserves especial praise. However, this help invariably came not at their own instigation, but because of intervention by the Comintern. Furthermore, the Irish had numerous grounds for complaint. Communications delivered to and from Moscow through London were unreliable; the CPGB made policy decisions on Ireland without recourse to the Irish themselves; and sometimes the CPGB even operated in Ireland without their knowledge. Although the CPGB were willing to follow instruction from Moscow, their letters and reports regarding Ireland betray a detached and often imperious approach. The Irish were not alone in their criticisms. The Communist Party of Australia similarly had a difficult relationship with the CPGB.[125] As Evan Smith argues, 'the Australian party felt that the CPGB as part of the Comintern's Anglo-American Secretariat belittled its antipodean sister party.'[126] Was this approach, however, actually imperialist as Larkin

alleged? Certainly, throughout their history the CPGB seemed to think the Irish section a burden. They were prone to meddle behind their back and quick to belittle them to Moscow, rather than offer solidarity that respected their right to independence in their own affairs. They betrayed an incredible disregard at times for sensitivities arising from the history between both islands. Discussions on Ireland were held with the Colonial Committee of the CPGB, for instance.[127] Taken as a whole, these appear not as isolated incidents, but as part of a pattern, hinting at an underlying *mentalité*. One of the clearest expressions of this occurred during the Spanish Civil War, when British communists had difficulty understanding why their Irish comrades took umbrage at being labelled 'British', and why they subsequently walked out of the 'British' Battalion of the International Brigades to join the American Lincoln Battalion. Indeed, the battalion, like most others, was named after an individual, in this instance Saklatvala, but, uniquely, this name was dropped for the generic title 'British', despite containing volunteers from Ireland, Cyprus, India, Egypt and elsewhere.[128] Labelling this as outright imperialism, however, is a step too far.

The CPGB were genuine revolutionaries and internationalists, as demonstrated time and again by their actions during the era of the Comintern. They were, however, based in the metropole of the largest empire in the world, and although they advocated its downfall, at the same time they could not help but be affected and sometimes even reflective of it. From the Irish perspective, they appeared paternalistic in their approach, adopting a 'we know best' attitude that required the hand of Moscow to occasionally reign them in. While not politically imperialist then, the CPGB in its relationship with Irish communists can be considered as 'culturally imperialist'. For the CPGB, it seemed better to do away with the Irish section than to help it surmount its problems. The idea that the Irish might have a valid perspective of their own does not seem to have occurred to them.

Notes

1. *The Communist*, 25 November 1920, 8.
2. See, for instance, O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire.*
3. Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, 237; cited in Bell, *Hesitant Comrades*, 153.
4. Morgan, Cohen and Flinn, *Communists and British Society*, 197.
5. Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, 15.

6. Ibid., 16.
7. McManus is often spelled as MacManus, but he used the former as his handwritten signature.
8. Horner, *Incorrigible Rebel*, 25–31.
9. Paul, *The Irish Crisis*; Fox, *Marx, Engels and Lenin on the Irish Revolution*. Thomas Alfred Jackson wrote numerous articles on Ireland over the years, but the ultimate testament to his interest was his book *Ireland Her Own* (1946). It is noteworthy that most of those named came from the 'impossibilist' tradition of British socialism, with a background in the Socialist Labour Party rather than the British Socialist Party, the latter of which comprised the majority of the CPGB's members.
10. Communist International, *Minutes of the Proceedings*, 127–28; cited in Bell, *Hesitant Comrades*, 114. Radek was speaking slightly before the CPGB was founded, though the point was directed at the British delegates to the Congress who aimed to build a Communist Party at home. *The Call* was the paper of the British Socialist Party, the *Workers' Dreadnought* that of Sylvia Pankhurst's Communist Party (British Section of the Third International). After the formation of the CPGB, the *Call* was reconstituted as *The Communist*, the official organ of the new party.
11. This was a common occurrence, where a larger/more experienced section assisted the building of an organisation in a country connected through empire, geography, or shared culture, as with Germany and Austria. This policy was not without its critics; the Indian communist M.N. Roy thought it 'smacked of imperialism'. R.W. Robson's report of Amsterdam Colonial Conference, July 1925, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1926, xxiii, 689, cited in Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, 41.
12. On the Americas, see Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean*; Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism*. On the CPGB and the British Empire, see Callaghan, "The Communists and the Colonies," 4–22; Smith, "National Liberation for Whom?" 283–315; Sherwood, "The Comintern, the CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons," 137–63; Callaghan, "Colonies, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern," 513–25; Redfern, "British Communists," 117–35.
13. The major exception is Morgan et al., *Communists and British Society*, 196–202.
14. Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland*; O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*; Treacy, *The Communist Party of Ireland*; McGuire, *Roddy Connolly*; McGuire, *Sean McLoughlin*; Byers, *Seán Murray*; McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves*. Examples of works that touch on Irish communism include Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion*; Grant, *Irish Socialist Republicanism*.
15. Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland*, 44.
16. The archive in Moscow is called Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History). Henceforth RGASPI.
17. O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 237.
18. Comrade Larkin, speech to the Presidium of the Comintern, 20 December 1926, RGASPI fond 495, op. 2, d. 64a, l. 97 (henceforth RGASPI 495/2/64a/97. The last number refers to the page).
19. Crowley et al., *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*.
20. See especially his *Labour in Irish History* (1910) and *The Re-Conquest of Ireland* (1915).
21. For the labour movement in these years, see O'Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland* and Kostick, *Revolution in Ireland*.
22. For the SPI, see O'Connor, "True Bolsheviks?" 209–22.
23. Ibid., 211.
24. O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 32–49.

25. Letter from the SPI to the Executive Committee Communist International (ECCI), 8 October 1921, RGASPI 495/89/10/6–7. See also *Workers' Republic*, 22 October 1921, 4. In the latter, it says they were expelled for 'reformism, consecutive non-attendance at the Party, and consistent attempts to render futile all efforts to build up a Communist Party in Ireland.' A detailed defence of their expulsion was published on p. 5.
26. Constitution of the CPI adopted 28 October 1921, RGASPI 495/89/7/6–13.
27. Letter from Secretariat ECCI, to CPI, 23 May 1922, RGASPI 495/89/12/13.
28. See for instance, letter and accompanying report from the CPI to the Finance Commission, Communist International, 9 November 1921, RGASPI 495/89/8/4–12.
29. Report of the Communist Party of Ireland to the ECCI, October 1921 to October 1922, 28.12.22. RGASPI 495/89/16/40–80 (the relevant information is from l. 46).
30. Ibid, RGASPI 495/89/16/50–51. *The Communist*, 8 October 1921, 5; 15 October 1921, 1. See also Interview of Roddy Connolly and George McLay, CPI, with Comintern representative Mikhail Borodin, 15 July 1922, RGASPI 495/89/13/22–23.
31. Report of the CPI to the ECCI October 1921 to October 1922, RGASPI 495/89/16/51–53.
32. Letter and resolution from JJ O'Leary, Secretary CPI, Dublin, to Secretary of the Comintern, 13 June 1922, RGASPI 495/89/12/16–18.
33. Report of the CPI to the ECCI October 1921 to October 1922, RGASPI 495/89/16/54.
34. Letter from J.J. Leary, CPI Dublin, to the Central Executive Committee, KPD (Communist Party of Germany), Berlin, 10 March 1922, RGASPI 495/89/12/4; Memorandum of the CPI to Com Raccosi [*sic*], Secretary, EC Comintern, 9 May 1922, from R Connolly, Berlin, RGASPI 495/89/12/11.
35. See note 27 above.
36. Interview of Connolly and McLay with Borodin, RGASPI 495/89/13/6.
37. See Report of the CPI to the ECCI, Oct 21-Oct 22, RGASPI 495/89/16/71–72.
38. *Workers' Voice*, 21 May 1932, 2.
39. *Workers' Republic*, 17 December 1921, 1–2; O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 56–7.
40. One member of the IRA executive, Peadar O'Donnell, joined the party. Interview with Connolly and McLay, RGASPI 495/89/13/17; George McLay, National Treasurer, CPI, to ECCI, 31 August 1922, RGASPI 495/89/12/39–46. However, they failed to gain a wider influence.
41. See Report of the CPI to the ECCI, October 1921 to October 1922, RGASPI 495/89/16/68–72; Connolly and McLay interview, RGASPI 495/89/13/20–21; and *Workers' Republic*, 29 July 1922, 1, 3, 4; 12 August 1922, 1,3, 4; 19 August 1922, 1, 4; 2 September 1922, 1.
42. Report of the CPI to ECCI, October 1921 to October 1922, RGASPI 495/89/16/69–70; Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland*, 60–61; McGuire, *Sean McLoughlin*, 93–95; O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 67–68.
43. Murphy, *New Horizons*, 184–6.
44. Untitled fragment of report, RGASPI 495/89/13/83–84. It is not clear which of the two wrote the report. The report states 'I.T. workers', which I am presuming is shorthand for 'Irish Transport' after the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.
45. George McLay, Political Secretary, 'Communist Party of Ireland Report to October 1st, 1923 from April 1923', RGASPI 495/89/22/74–76.
46. Letter from Arthur McManus to The Secretariat, The Comintern, Moscow, 11 October 1923, RGASPI 495/18/210/52–55.
47. Ibid, RGASPI 495/18/210/52–53.
48. Ibid, RGASPI 495/18/210/54. For the CPI's reply, see their letter to the ECCI, 1 December 1923, RGASPI 495/89/22/81–82.
49. See Letter from Arthur McManus to the Secretariat, The Comintern, 11 October 1923, RGASPI 495/18/210/52.

50. O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 91; McGuire, *Roddy Connolly*, 92.
51. There are a number of biographies of Jim Larkin, of which O'Connor's *Big Jim Larkin* is the most thorough. All uncited background information on Larkin in this article is readily available in this and other biographies.
52. Letter from McManus to the Secretariat, The Comintern, 11 October 1923, RGASPI 495/18/210/54–55.
53. McManus admitted this in a letter to the Workers' Party of America, dated 2 February 1924, but recognised his ability to attract 'the masses', and hoped that a communist group could be built around him. RGASPI 495/38/7/244–248.
54. Letter from McManus to the Secretariat, The Comintern, 11 October 1923, RGASPI 495/18/210/55.
55. Letter from Comrade McManus to Comrade Kuusinen, 2 February 1924, RGASPI 495/38/7/243–244.
56. O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 95–6; Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland*, 74.
57. Letter to 'Comrade Larkin', from the Secretariat, ECCI, 2 June 1924, RGASPI 495/89/27/5. The letter gushed that 'The place of Ireland in the world revolutionary movement is so important and your own work on behalf of the Irish working class so well known, that on the occasion of the Fifth Congress we repeat our invitation to you to come to Moscow'.
58. The ITGWU produced a useful but damning collection of documents related to Larkin's activities in these years, *The Attempt to Smash the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union* (Dublin: ITGWU, 1924). O'Connor suggests the editor was probably William O'Brien, *Big Jim Larkin*, 242.
59. The latter was announced in the *Irish Worker*, 8 September 1923.
60. O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland*, 130–32.
61. Resolution on the Irish Question, Presidium of the ECCI, 7 January 1925, RGASPI 495/89/28/22–24.
62. Stewart, *Breaking the* Fetters, 149–50.
63. For details, see O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 104–10. Stewart recalled of his time in Ireland that 'I soon found that one of my greatest difficulties was to keep the peace among our own people. Larkin was the biggest problem because he always personalised his politics. He would denounce this scoundrel, that scoundrel, in fact almost everyone in Ireland was a scoundrel.' *Breaking the Fetters*, 149.
64. O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 110; Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland*, 79–80; Stewart, *Breaking the Fetters*, 154.
65. Remarques du Com Murphy, undated [1926?], RGASPI 495/89/28/28.
66. Pollitt to the Profintern, 5 February 1925, RGASPI 534/7/26/38–39 cited in O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 113.
67. Pollitt to Lozovsky, 2 September 1925, RGASPI 534/7/26/154–156 cited in O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 113.
68. Comrade Larkin, speech to the Presidium of the Comintern, 20 December 1926, RGASPI 495/2/64a/95–99 [quote from l. 96].
69. Ibid., RGASPI 495/2/64a/96.
70. Ibid., RGASPI 495/2/64a/98.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid., RGASPI 495/2/64a/97.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid., RGASPI 495/2/64a/99.
75. Ibid., RGASPI 495/2/64a/97.
76. Letter from Albert Inkpin, General Secretary CPGB, to Comrade Bennett, Comintern, Moscow, 10 July 1925, RGASPI 495/100/242/2–3.

77. Comrade Larkin, speech to the Presidium of the Comintern, 20 December 1926, RGASPI 495/2/64a/97.
78. Ibid.
79. Comrade Smith, speech to the Presidium of the Comintern, 20 December 1926, RGASPI 495/2/64a/100–101.
80. Ibid, RGASPI 495/2/64a/100.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid., RGASPI 495/2/64a/101.
84. J.T. Murphy, speech on the Irish Question to the Presidium of the Comintern, 7 January 1927, RGASPI 495/2/70/8.
85. Irish Draft Resolution, 5 January 1927, RGASPI 495/3/3/15–17. Although it is marked as this at Queen's University Belfast, the original in Moscow has been digitised, and its designation is listed as 495/3/2/7–9. See http://sovdoc.rusarchives.ru/#showunit&id=125255 [accessed 13 May 2016]. Another version of the resolution appears at 495/2/70/74–76 where it is dated 26 January 1928. It is unknown if this is a mistake or if, perhaps, the resolution was not approved until then. I will use the first designation when citing.
86. Irish Draft Resolution, 5 January 1927, RGASPI 495/3/3/15.
87. Ibid., RGASPI 495/3/3/16.
88. Unknown 'For the Secretariat', CPGB, to J. Larkin, Irish Worker League, 9 February 1927, RGASPI 495/100/427/6.
89. O'Connor, *Big Jim Larkin*, 266.
90. Re Election Campaign in Ireland to the Executive Committee of the Irish Workers' [*sic*] League, 23 January 1928, RGASPI 495/89/40/56–60.
91. Speech of Comrade Larkin, 9th ECCI Plenum, Trade Union Commission, 5th Sitting, 13 February 1928, RGASPI 495/167/75/83–96.
92. Speech of J.R. Campbell, 9th ECCI Plenum, Trade Union Commission, 6th Session, 14 February 1928, RGASPI 495/167/78/4–7.
93. Minutes of the Meeting of the Anglo-American Secretariat for Monday, 20 February 1928. Irish Commission, speech of Larkin, RGASPI 495/72/34/1–28.
94. Ibid., RGASPI 495/72/34/11–12.
95. Ibid., RGASPI 495/72/34/19.
96. Ibid., RGASPI 495/72/34/25.
97. Ibid., RGASPI 495/72/34/26–27.
98. See Preliminary Report in the Present Situation and Our Policy, to the PolitSecretariat and Anglo-Amer. Secretariat ECCI, from Dublin, 26 November 1929, by Tom Bell, representative in Ireland, RGASPI 495/89/64/64–71.
99. Report of the C.I. Commission in Ireland to the Anglo-American Secretariat ECCI, Dublin 17 March 1930, RGASPI 495/89/62/1–4.
100. Report on the Situation and Tasks of the Revolutionary Workers' Groups in Ireland (Period of December 1930 and Jan. 1931), RGASPI 495/14/334/1–8.
101. Report from Ireland, received 22 March 1931, RGASPI 495/89/64/49.
102. Ibid, RGASPI 495/89/64/51–52.
103. Bell, on the other hand, was not, and was accused variously of drunkenness and sectarianism regarding members of the IRA, for which he was withdrawn. See Report from Secretariat, received 30 January 1931, RGASPI 495/89/65/1–4; and Draft Resolution on Ireland by Comrade [J.R.] Campbell, 1 September 1930, RGASPI 495/89/61/19–22.
104. Letter to Robin [Page Arnot], 25.5.31 from R. Stewart, RGASPI 495/89/65/48–51.
105. Letter to the CPGB on the Irish Question (Adopted by Pol-Commission 9.8.32.), RGASPI 495/4/207/168–171.

106. Ibid. This line was repeated with numerous examples given in a report by Rozhnov on 22 December 1932, RGASPI 495/89/78/124–129.
107. Letter of Anglo-American Secretariat to Ireland RE: elections, 7 January 1932, RGASPI 495/89/75/1.
108. See Byers, *Seán Murray*.
109. O'Donnell never re-joined the communists after his membership of the original CPI, although he would remain close to them.
110. Grant, *Irish Socialist Republicanism*, 199–201.
111. Gilmore, *The Irish Republican Congress*, 30.
112. Gilmore, *The Irish Republican Congress*, 45; Byrne, *The Irish Republican Congress Revisited*, 30; *Republican Congress*, 6 October 1934, 1.
113. Gilmore, *The Irish Republican Congress*, 46–57; McGuire, *Roddy Connolly*, 147.
114. *Irish Workers' Voice*, 14 April 1934, 4.
115. Instructions to CPI re Republican Congress 16 September 1934, RGASPI 495/89/96/46–47.
116. O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, 201–04.
117. *Republican Congress*, 13 October 1934, 2.
118. Connolly O'Brien, *We Shall Rise Again*, 72.
119. Gilmore, *The Irish Republican Congress*, 56; Byrne, *The Irish Republican Congress Revisited*, 32; *Republican Congress*, 6 October 1934, 1.
120. Directive letter to Ireland 14 October 1934, RGASPI 495/89/96/56–64.
121. Letter from Sean Murray to the Anglo-American Secretariat re the proposed visit of O'Donnell to USSR, dated 7 September 1935, RGASPI 495/14/335/17. The same letter is handwritten here: RGASPI 495/14/335/24–30.
122. 15 January 1936, letter from Harry Pollitt regarding his visit to Ireland on 11–12 Jan, RGASPI 495/14/220/2–3. Pollitt was not the only one to express concern over Murray's ability to lead. Some of the Dublin membership thought likewise, as did another visitor from the Comintern, Max Raylock. For the latter, see Letter from M. Raylock, 29 July 1936, RGASPI 495/14/341/98–101.
123. Zusammenfassung der Debatte zu dieser Frage auf der ZK-Sitzung der KP Englands am 1 und 3 Juli 1938, RGASPI 495/20/252/36–49.
124. Communist Party of Ireland, *Communist Party of Ireland Outline History*, 31.
125. Macintyre, *The Reds*; Bozinovski, "The Communist Party of Australia," 56. My thanks to Evan Smith for these references.
126. Evan Smith, 'Anti-colonialism and the imperial dynamic in the Anglophone communist movements in South Africa, Australia and Britain'. Unpublished paper, presented at the Transnational Leftism workshop, McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada, 25 September 2017.
127. See references in RGASPI 495/89/64/52 and 58–61 for instance, and RGASPI 495/89/90/29.
128. See Convery, "Brigadistas," 85–95, 179–87.

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The Connolly Association, the Catholic Church, and anti-communism in Britain and Ireland during the early Cold War

Gerard Madden

ABSTRACT
During the Cold War era, the Connolly Association, an Irish republican socialist political organisation in Britain close to the Communist Party of Great Britain, was seen by British Communists as a potential means of winning recruits amongst Britain's growing post-war Irish community. This view was shared by the Catholic Church, which, amidst the broader ideological atmosphere of the Cold War, placed an increased emphasis on anti-communism in the early post-war years. This article will discuss clerical opposition to the Connolly Association in early Cold War Britain and Ireland, drawing chiefly on diocesan archives and Catholic periodicals.

Speaking to George A. Garrett, the United States ambassador to Ireland, on 22 January 1949, Archbishop John Charles McQuaid of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin was contemptuous of the strength of the communist movement in Ireland. In his subsequent report of the conversation to Washington, Garrett reported that McQuaid confidently asserted that the 'humble people of this land were prepared to resist and fight any manifestations or encroachments' of communism. In supporting this contention, McQuaid pointed to the considerable response from ordinary Irish Catholics, following a radio appeal from McQuaid, to fundraising efforts to support Italian Catholic Action during Italy's April 1948 general election in order to ensure a Christian Democrat victory and keep Italy's communists out of power. Overall, around £60,000 was sent to Rome through the efforts of the Irish state, the Irish Catholic Church, and private collections.[1] However, McQuaid identified one particular way in

which the Irish communist movement could conceivably gain strength: th**r**ough the Connolly Association, an Irish republican socialist group in Britain with close links to the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).[2]

McQuaid's viewpoint was indicative of broader anxieties which underpinned Catholicism in the era. In the last two decades, the religious dimension of the Cold War has been the subject of increased attention by scholars, with a notable focus on Roman Catholicism and US–Vatican relations in the early post-war period. The appearance in 2002 of Dianne Kirby's *Religion and the Cold War*—a book with four chapters dealing with Catholicism and the Vatican—was an important moment in the development of this sub-genre,[3] while the growing acknowledgment of the importance of religion and Catholicism to the Cold War is illustrated by the fact that two recent volumes exploring the Cold War include chapters dealing with these subjects.[4] Increasing work has also been done on the impact of the Cold War on the Christian churches in Britain and Ireland.[5] This article, which is drawn from a broader project looking at the Irish Catholic Church, anti-communism and the Cold War, will make an original contribution to this growing sub-genre of Cold War studies by exploring the common concern amongst the Catholic clergy in both Britain and Ireland that the Connolly Association could draw members of the Irish community in Britain into the communist movement. In doing so, it will provide important insights into the socio-political and religio-political dimensions of the Cold War in Britain and Ireland, the Catholic Church on both islands in the twentieth century, as well as the communist movements in both Britain and Ireland.

In Ireland, where the jailings of key Catholic prelates in eastern Europe's 'new democracies' after the Second World War prompted passionate anti-communist reactions from Irish Catholics as they did from Catholics internationally, concerns about the vulnerability of Irish immigrants to recruitment by British communists were a frequent theme of post-war clerical rhetoric. These concerns reflected broader fears within the Irish Catholic Church, dating from the Victorian era, that, in Enda Delaney's words, the 'naive Irish newcomer' was vulnerable to losing his or her faith in the environment of urban Britain, which was portrayed as 'dangerous and something to be feared'. In particular, the view that Irish Catholics in Britain were susceptible to 'coming under Communist influence' was a common one among Irish priests of the era, alongside wider fears about

Irish migrants falling into lives of immorality.[6] For instance, a 1950s Catholic Truth Society of Ireland (CTSI) pamphlet entitled *Handbook for the Catholic emigrant to England* described communism as being amongst a number of moral threats, alongside Protestantism and Freemasonry, which Irish Catholics would have to encounter and resist in Britain. The fact the Connolly Association took its name from James Connolly, the iconic Irish socialist who was executed for his leading role in the Easter Rising of April 1916, was seen as particularly egregious by Irish Catholic anti-communists, and was identified as an example of how communists allegedly appealed to nationalistic sentiments amongst the Irish community in Britain to recruit them into the communist movement. The post-war period saw an increase in global diplomatic lobbying against the partition of Ireland by Irish governments, as well as a renewed wave of campaigning by popular anti-partition campaigns such as the Irish Anti-Partition League, which was also active in Britain. The CTSI pamphlet warned Irish Catholics in Britain that it was 'grievously sinful' to join a communist group—'even if, like the Connolly Club, they use patriotic names as a disguise'.[7] As this article will demonstrate, these concerns were not confined to lay Catholics like the CTSI, but were reflected at the top of the Irish hierarchy, as well as amongst Catholics in Britain.

The early years of the Connolly Association

The Connolly Clubs (later known as the Connolly Association, though some opponents would continue to refer to it by its original title) were founded on 4 September 1938, in the offices of the Amalgamated Engineering Union in Doughty Street, Bloomsbury, London. Roddy Connolly, son of James Connolly, accepted the group's Presidency, while its first Secretary was CPGB member Michael McInerney. Those behind its formation had been involved in a number of radical Irish groups in London, most notably *Irish Front*, a newspaper published by the London branch of the Republican Congress, a left-wing party which had split from the IRA in 1934. The paper continued to be published even after the Congress's dissolution, due to the efforts of Leslie Daiken, its Irish-Jewish editor. Daiken was amongst the first editorial board of the Connolly Association's newspaper, *Irish Freedom* (from January 1945, the *Irish Democrat*), which debuted in January 1939 and was initially edited by McInerney. Early

contributors included the British Marxist historian T. A. Jackson, the playwright Seán O'Casey and the novelist and former Republican Congress member Peadar O'Donnell. Membership was boosted with the return of Irishmen from the conflict in Spain, notably Bob Doyle, who went on become a veteran figure in the Irish communist movement, and the poet Ewart Milne.[8] The Association was soon active in most of the main areas of Britain, and by early 1940 was claiming branches in London, Wealdstone, Wellingborough, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Newcastle, Glasgow, Coatbridge and Portsmouth.[9] In 1941, it gained a recruit who would become its most important member: Charles Desmond Greaves, a middle-class Birkenhead native and CPGB member of Ulster Protestant background. Greaves, who had sold the *Republican Congress* newspaper of the eponymous party in Irish areas of Liverpool in the 1930s, would become the Association's leading figure, immediately joining the Association's Executive and the *Democrat*'s editorial board. He also headed its Emigrants' Advisory Bureau, which gave everyday advice to Irish emigrants.[10]

Irish Freedom reflected the CPGB's shifting line during the Second World War, opposing British participation before the Soviet Union's entry in June 1941 and strongly supporting the Allied war effort thereafter, while still expressing criticism of partition. Greaves later claimed that his influence was crucial in securing the paper's change of heart on the war, asserting that Pat Dooley, the paper's editor for most of the war years, was initially unwilling to reverse its opposition to British participation.[11] Contrary to later accusations from Irish Catholic anti-communists, *Irish Freedom* did not call on Ireland—where public opinion overwhelmingly supported neutrality—to enter the war. Rather, the Connolly Association defended Irish neutrality, though it criticised aspects of Ireland's wartime policies, such as Fianna Fáil Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Éamon de Valera's decision not to expel Axis diplomats from the country.[12] Alongside highlighting Irish service in the British and United States militaries and in British munitions factories, *Irish Freedom* sought to rally Irish Catholics in Britain behind the Soviet Union by portraying support for the country as a position that devout Catholics could hold without contradicting their faith, drawing upon statements by Catholic clergy in Britain and the United States affirming this view. Vehemently criticising a 1943 address critical of the Soviet Union at Queens' University Belfast by Rev. Cornelius Lucey, a

Professor at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth and later a Bishop of Cork, Dooley instead praised Cardinal Arthur Hinsley of Westminster's alleged statement to American Catholics that 'A Catholic in America who would not give all aid to Russia is not true to his faith'.[13] Such arguments, however, remained unconvincing to many Irish Catholics in Britain, hindering the paper's appeal. One letter from a Lancashire seller in 1943 described how its writer was finding selling the paper 'difficult. Many Irish Catholics oppose aid to the Soviet Union until Ulster is given back, saying Britain and the USSR have no moral principles, being pagan countries, and that the British government are no better than the Nazis'.[14] Irish Freedom's criticisms of the wartime policies of de Valera's government contributed to its banning by Ireland's censor, Thomas Coyne, in March 1943, paralleling an earlier Northern Ireland ban. Coyne told Fianna Fáil Minister Frank Aiken, who oversaw censorship, that he believed *Irish Freedom* was subsidised by both the Soviet Union and Scotland Yard, which allegedly found it 'convenient to have politically-minded left-wing Irishmen grouped together in a single organisation whose activities can be easily supervised by the police'.[15]

Given the prominence of CPGB members within it, the Connolly Association encountered Catholic accusations that it was a communist front organisation immediately after its foundation. In February and March 1939, Britain's leading Catholic newspaper, the *Catholic Herald*, ran a series of articles claiming that the Irish Anti-Partition League had been infiltrated by communists who had pressured its chairman, a priest, to leave his position. Concerns about communist infiltration of anti-partition groups in Britain would become a recurring concern for the Association's Catholic opponents, particularly as the CPGB emphasised its anti-partitionist credentials in constituencies with large Irish populations in the post-war era. The party actually outpolled Anti-Partition League candidates in several such constituencies in the 1950 general election.[16] While the *Herald* did not denounce *Irish Freedom* by name, instead obliquely warning of 'a new Irish Leftist monthly', the articles clearly referred to the paper. Mentioning an article which featured in Irish Freedom's inaugural issue under the pseudonym 'Fenian' that queried whether having a priest in a prominent position in the League could alienate British and Protestant opinion, the *Herald* went on to quote a Manchester priest who described *Irish Freedom* as 'definitely communist' and warned Irish parishioners not to read it.[17] In

response to these allegations, the Association distanced itself from the CPGB, emphasising that membership was not limited to any party. Belfast's Betty Sinclair, herself a CPGB member of the Connolly Association and a graduate of the Lenin School in Moscow, sidestepped claims made at a 1939 London Easter Rising commemoration that the body was communist, declaring it was: 'organised by the labours of Irish men and women and without subsidy from any source except the sacrifices of our members. Every movement to uplift the Irish working class or any working class for that matter, at one time or another earns the label "Communist"'.[18]

Irish Freedom consequently claimed that Catholic clergy in Britain were attempting to hinder its sales. In January 1940, responding to an unnamed priest in Willesden, London, who had allegedly attempted to obstruct its circulation locally, the paper quoted James Connolly's claim in a 1908 edition of the *Harp* newspaper that he had 'read a good many scare fulminations against Socialism from His Holiness down and I have never seen but one from such a source that showed any real knowledge of what Socialism really was'.[19] In May 1941, its Editorial Board, in a front-page statement, claimed that 'certain priests' had contacted members of the police and Home Guard to intimidate sellers of the paper. In response, it told its sellers to 'move on when requested by the police or priest or Home Guard, but there is no law which can prevent you continuing your sales from off the footpath or a short distance from any building'.[20]

The *Catholic Herald* returned its attention to *Irish Freedom* in February 1941, this time mentioning it by name. Denouncing it alongside another periodical, the *Voice of Spain*, in a front-page headline, it described it as 'the organ of the Connolly Clubs' whose programme was 'indistinguishable from that of British Communists and near-Communists'. The *Herald* submitted a list of questions to the Connolly Association which chiefly dealt with its links to communism, the group's response echoing Sinclair by accusing the *Herald* of following 'in the long tradition of those who fall back on the word "Communist" in an attempt to discredit many of the finest defenders of the working people'. The *Herald* also used the Connolly Association's support of the CPGB's 1941 People's Convention to accuse its members of being 'defeatists [who] work against the war effort'.[21] *Irish Freedom* hit back robustly, dismissing the questionnaire as 'ignorant and impertinent'. It questioned whether the *Herald* was representative of Irish

Catholics in Britain, claiming that 'Irish Catholics in England will have no associations with any newspaper tending towards British Imperialism'.[22]

Dublin's *Standard* newspaper, a leading Catholic periodical in Ireland, also targeted the Association in the first of many barbed attacks over the following years. In 1943, it warned that 'the Communist likelihood of success in inculcating their virus among emigrant workers is a question of vital importance not only to the emigrants themselves but to the Irish people'. The article quoted a London priest familiar with the heavily Irish areas of Kilburn and Cricklewood, who claimed that 35% of Irish Catholic men lapsed within 2 years of emigrating to Britain: 'half through laziness and inability to overcome their environment; with the rest it is more political than anything else'. Women were more likely to remain attached to their faith, the priest asserted, further claiming that communists were agitating amongst the London Irish, even at social events organised for them by the Church: 'there are always a few whom we suspect of being there for purposes that have nothing to do with Irish dancing, but a great deal to do with undesirable political activities. And that is probably typical of what happens all over the country'. The article highlighted the *Democrat*'s alleged similarity to the Belfast communist periodical *Unity* and the fact it shared office space with the International Brigades' Association as evidence of its communism. Greaves explained the latter situation to the *Standard* by stating that 'several of their members were Irish … we were in full sympathy with their aims even though we had nothing to do with their founding'. The *Standard*, predictably, was unconvinced, concluding by accusing the Connolly Association of spreading 'camouflaged communist propaganda'.[23]

Catholic opposition to the Connolly Association in the post-war period: an overview

Catholic suspicion of the Connolly Association continued into the Cold War era, and the group was vocally criticised by important members of the Irish Catholic hierarchy into the 1960s. In an address at University College Galway in November 1948, which received widespread attention in the Irish press, Bishop Michael Browne of Galway drew attention to a statement by the British Trade Union Congress condemning CPGB influence within the trade union movement which listed both the Connolly

Association and *Irish Democrat* as 'subsidiary organisations' of the CPGB. Browne, an outspoken critic of communism, claimed that 'it is a fact that well-known communists are connected with this Association as founders and members of the Executive; it is also established that members of these clubs soon cease to go to the sacraments and to Mass'. Browne identified the *Irish Democrat* as having 'as its main object to infect Irish workers with the Communist Party-Line'. Accusing the Association of hijacking James Connolly's name, and asserting that the Easter Rising leader was a loyal Catholic, Browne cited its opposition to the Marshall Plan, its alleged opposition to Irish neutrality during the war, and its criticism of the Irish hierarchy's fundraising intervention in the 1948 Italian general election.[24]

Other noted critics included Bishop Patrick O'Neill of Limerick, who asserted in a pastoral letter the same year that while

> many will doubtless think that in all this noise [about communism] there is nothing but an empty scare … it is well-known that our workers in Great Britain have been subjected to powerful propaganda to induce them to join Clubs under Communist control or direction. When these return home, if they do, it is scarcely to be hoped that they will be altogether free from the evil influences brought to bear on them.[25]

Stating that many people from the parish had emigrated to Britain and the United States, Bishop Neil Farren of Derry warned worshippers at a 1956 confirmation in Clonmany, County Donegal, that

> It is not uncommon in big works in parts of England for men to set out to befriend the Irish in the hope of getting them to join organisations that are communistic and unChristian … their technique is that they encourage the young Irishman to be frivolous and spendthrift so that when it comes to the time of paying his union fees he has not the money at hand and the English friend pays them for him.[26]

In the same year, Cardinal John D'Alton of the Archdiocese of Armagh dedicated his annual pastoral letter to the Catholic clergy and laity of his Archdiocese to the issue of communism. He declared that communists 'are quick … to trade on names which are revered in the ranks of Irish labour. We know how the Clubs in Britain, established ostensibly to honour the memory of James Connolly, are used for the dissemination of communist doctrine among our emigrants'.[27] Bishop Cornelius Lucey of Cork subsequently publicly condemned the Connolly Association in 1956 and 1961, describing its members as 'faithful adherents of the Communist

propaganda line in all controversial issues'.[28] Lucey later claimed that the 'real purpose of the Association was to further the cause of Marxian socialism, which was communism under another name'.[29]

These anxieties were echoed in Britain. Paralleling the views of other Christian denominations, and influenced by Pope Pius XII's response to the persecution of the Church in the Eastern Bloc, the post-war period saw the Catholic Church in Britain intensify its opposition to communism. In 1948, for instance, Cardinal Bernard Griffin of Westminster affirmed that Catholics were free to vote for any political party but the CPGB.[30] Historians of the CPGB have noted that the party 'depended disproportionately on groups falling outside what has been constructed as a core "English" or loyalist British, majority of the population', and that this cemented the view amongst the party's enemies that it was 'something alien, "artificial" and extraneous to British society'.[31] This view was reflected in British Catholic portrayals of the CPGB. Of particular concern to Catholic clergy in Britain was the perceived vulnerability of immigrant communities to communist recruitment. The fear that 'coloured workers' were susceptible to recruitment by the communist movement was a frequent theme of pastoral letters by the British Catholic hierarchy in the period. It is unsurprising, therefore, that this anxiety extended to the Irish Catholic community in Britain, given that over 50,000 people from the Republic of Ireland moved to Britain every year in the 1950s.[32] The perceived threat of communism to the Irish community in Britain was a regular preoccupation of Britain's *Catholic Herald* and of its columnist Douglas Hyde in particular. Hyde was a former CPGB member and noted Catholic propagandist of the early Cold War period who regularly visited Ireland on his anti-communist speaking tours.[33]

The phenomenon of Irish migrants in Britain being radicalised and joining the CPGB was genuine, even if far rarer than McQuaid and his contemporaries feared. While the predominantly working-class nature of the Irish Catholic community in Britain and a shared opposition to the partition of Ireland meant they were a seemingly natural constituency for the CPGB to recruit from, the Catholicism of the Irish meant that they were instead arguably the most reliably anti-communist element of the working class in Britain. Exceptions to the rule included Seán Murray, general secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland, J. D. Bernal, a Tipperary-born

physicist and leading CPGB member, Bob Doyle, a noted International Brigader, and Brian Behan, brother of the more celebrated Brendan Behan, the world-renowned short-story writer, novelist and playwright. This number expands when one considers those in the Party, such as leading Scottish communist Willie Gallacher and the Manchester International Brigadier Sam Wild, who, while British-born, were of Irish Catholic descent. Many of these individuals retained a strong identification with Ireland, Wild, for instance, considering himself 'more Irish than English'. For the CPGB, the Connolly Association proved a useful gateway to the Irish in Britain, providing, in Morgan, Cohen and Flinn's words, 'a vehicle for socialist republicanism under communist direction'.[34]

Patrick Smylie has endorsed this viewpoint in his recent study of Irish communism during the Cold War, which argues that 'bipolar disputes about the exertion or complete absence of CPGB domination' of the Connolly Association miss the point. Instead, Smylie argues that the CPGB viewed the Connolly Association as an important means of conducting party activity amongst the Irish community in Britain, but that the Association cannot just be reduced to being an appendage of the CPGB.[35] This argument is supported by a 1953 report the CPGB's International Department submitted to its Political Committee, which asserted that the majority of the Connolly Association's membership was non-communist. However, it also described the Connolly Association and the *Democrat* as the party's means of conducting 'broad work' amongst the Irish community in Britain.[36] Indeed, as former Connolly Association member Roy Johnston has recalled, relations between the party's Irish members and Association activists could sometimes be 'somewhat edgy', with the two often competing with each other for potential recruits amongst the Irish community in Britain.[37] Many in the CPGB, including Brian Behan, felt that the party should work directly with the Irish community through its own structures. The fact that some insisted on selling the *Irish Workers' Voice*, newspaper of Ireland's own communist party, the Irish Workers' League (IWL), even prompted brawls between Connolly Association and CPGB members.[38]

The Connolly Association was also of concern in terms of state security responses to communism in Britain and Ireland. James Dillon, an independent TD (MP) who later rejoined his former party Fine Gael and

became its leader,[39] repeatedly pressed subsequent Irish governments in Dáil Éireann, Ireland's lower house, to condemn the Association for its communist politics. In June 1947, he noted that Connolly Association figure Pat Dooley had been a CPGB member, and that Arthur Horner, a leading CPGB figure, had previously addressed a Connolly Association meeting. Dillon was particularly concerned that the Association's condemnations of partition could win it support amongst the Irish community in Britain.[40] De Valera refused to condemn the Connolly Association categorically as communist when Dillon raised the matter again in the Dáil the following month: 'I would probably say they are. That would be my impression. But I do not want to say that here, definitely, until I have satisfied myself that they are'.[41] While De Valera's refusal to state irrefutably that the Connolly Association was communist did not entirely rule out the idea, the *Irish Democrat* trumpeted the Dáil exchange. Pat Clancy, the Connolly Association's Secretary, asserted that: 'Mr de Valera's refusal to condemn the Connolly Association, as requested by Mr. Dillon, was a rebuff to these enemies of the Irish people'.[42]

Subsequent Irish governments felt more assured in replying in the affirmative when asked to condemn the Association, however. On being asked by Fine Gael backbencher Sir Anthony Esmonde in 1954 whether he was aware that the Connolly Association was communist, party colleague and Minister for Foreign Affairs Liam Cosgrave—who later served as Taoiseach—replied that

> it would appear that the Clubs referred to by the Deputy are Communist controlled. As the Deputy is no doubt aware, certain Irish Catholic bishops have, from time to time, warned young people taking up employment in Britain against joining the Connolly Clubs … for my part, I can only endorse these warnings.[43]

Cosgrave's Fianna Fáil successor as Minister for Foreign Affairs, Frank Aiken, was similarly condemnatory when Esmonde again asked the government in 1958 to 'bring the dangers of joining those Clubs to the notice of Irish nationals in England'.[44] The Association was being monitored by the security services on both sides of the Irish Sea, Scotland Yard telling Irish officials in 1958 that the Connolly Association's leadership were all 'card-carrying members of the Communist Party'.[45]

Catholic anti-communism, the CPGB and the Connolly Association

The increasingly vocal anti-communism of the Catholic Church in Britain and internationally was of concern to the CPGB in the post-war period. While asserting that 'no-one has the right to quarrel with Catholics for their religious beliefs', party member Olive Parsons warned in *Communist Review*, a party journal, in January 1947 that a markedly anti-communist political Catholicism was increasingly exerting influence in Britain, noting its increased input into British Foreign Office policy and its sponsoring of lay Catholic anti-communist groups in the trade unions.[46] The failure of Willie Gallacher to retain his seat in Scotland's West Fife constituency in Britain's 1950 General Election—a major blow to the party, which also lost its only other seat—was widely perceived as being caused by local opposition to Gallacher from the Catholic clergy and laity. Gallacher commentated afterwards that he was 'defeated before polling began, the Catholics concentrated against me'.[47] Arising from increasing complaints of clerical opposition to the CPGB from party cadres on the ground, Pollitt and the CPGB's Political Committee in 1948 sought the advice of local party districts and prominent figures associated with the Party on the issue, many of whom were Irish or of Irish ancestry.

Amongst the figures Pollitt approached was regular *Irish Democrat* contributor Seán O'Casey. Indicating he was 'seriously concerned at the rise of Roman Catholic political activity everywhere, and particularly in this country' Pollitt asked O'Casey for advice on formulating a response which would 'not alienate Roman Catholics, but rather make them see the danger of what their own leaders are doing'.[48] In response, O'Casey urged the CPGB to take a combative stance, while allowing that any attempt by the CPGB to push back against Catholic anti-communism would inevitably prove divisive: 'It will be very difficult to get R. Catholics to see the danger of what their leaders are doing, and impossible to do it without "alienating" some of them, maybe a lot of them'.[49] After the exchange, O'Casey was privately withering of what he saw as the CPGB's failure to appreciate the potency of Catholic anti-communism and what he perceived as its timid attitude to the Church, complaining to friend Jack Daly that the *Daily Worker* had been watering down his articles on Catholicism:

> The fear of giving offence to "Catholic workers" is an obsession with them (…) I wish Communists would read more. Harry evidently thinks he knows more about Catholicism than he does. They should have a special library dealing with the Vatican & all its works & pomps.[50]

During these years, communists in Britain and Ireland often cited James Connolly's *Labour, Nationality and Religion* as a refutation of Catholic criticisms of communism. Connolly authored the work in 1910 in response to a series of anti-socialist lectures given by Father Robert Kane, a Jesuit, in Dublin that year. In the preface to a 1950s Irish Workers' League reprint of the work, the IWL declared that 'one is amazed both at the similarity of Fr. Kane's arguments to the present-day distortions of socialism, and the freshness of Connolly's reply, which reads as if it had been written yesterday'.[51] O'Casey, however, viewed *Labour, Nationality and Religion* as being of limited use in this regard. He subsequently told Pollitt that 'Connolly really didn't understand the C. Faith, either in theory or practice, and he wrote always under the shadow of clerical domination'. O'Casey further argued that attempts by the Church to sanitise Connolly had made his writings redundant: 'If any worker quoted Connolly to a cleric, he would be sympathetically told that Connolly died a true Churchman, and that all the more extreme views that he might have held, had been repented of, and forgiven'.[52]

Pollitt also consulted leading Connolly Association figures, notably Greaves, who had become editor of the *Irish Democrat* in January 1948 in order to reverse the paper's fortunes at a time when its sales were slumping from a wartime height.[53] Greaves counselled that the CPGB not see the Catholic community in Britain as a 'homogenous reactionary mass', and that it should instead 'rally the democratic forces within the Catholics'. Noting that the most obvious divide amongst British Catholics was that of class, Greaves further asserted that the division between English and Irish Catholics was also important. While acknowledging that neither community was a homogenous block, Greaves suggested that British Catholics were 'in the main better off', while the Irish Catholic community in Britain, which he estimated as roughly 800,000 strong, or representing a quarter of the Catholic population, were more likely to be split off as a 'democratic reserve', given the existence of an 'unsolved national problem' amongst them.

Greaves further subdivided the Irish community in Britain into the 'new Irish' and 'old Irish'. The 'new Irish' consisted of 400,000 migrants who had come to Britain since 1924. Of these, Greaves identified the 200,000 who had come since 1945 as:

> a generation which has forgotten 1916 and is less bitterly nationalistic and more open to progressive ideas than the older ones. The *Irish Democrat* circulates almost exclusively amongst these newer sections of the 'new' Irish. Irish affairs are very much alive to them and they have a direct influence on Irish politics by going backwards and forwards between the 2 countries.

In contrast, Greaves defined the 'old Irish' as those who emigrated prior to 1924. These, while mostly voting Labour, were more conservative and, 'beyond a vague embittered nationalism', had 'little Irish left about them but religion. Thus, the strength of the Anti-Partition League is largely a consequence of the backing it receives from the church'.

Greaves outlined a number of remedies to the challenge of Catholic anti-communism. While noting that the CPGB's Irish Committee found the older section of the Irish community harder to reach, Greaves suggested than an increased focus by the *Irish Democrat* on the undemocratic nature of the Northern Irish state could have some success. He echoed other suggestions that the CPGB publish *Labour, Nationality and Religion*, arguing that the CPGB would win much sympathy amongst Catholics by simultaneously defending the right of Catholics to practice their religion while denying the clergy's right to interfere in politics, a strategy that would underpin his perspective in coming years. Noting the case of a Corkman who had been denounced by a priest as a socialist, he suggested that ordinary Catholics write to the local Bishop in protest, noting 'many Irish Catholics were disgusted by the collecting of £40,000 to go to Italy while people are living in penury and one wrote us a letter'. Catholics, he urged, should be openly invited to join the CPGB, and he identified campaigns surrounding peace and nuclear disarmament as areas where communists could find common ground with Catholic organisations. Greaves concluded by recommending that the CPGB publish a brief statement rebutting Catholic arguments against communism:

> We might even distribute it at church doors after mass. The thing to remember is that those who attend mass are often in mental conflict with it. Many of them hate the restriction, the

> mental slavery and mumbo-jumbo and will take no notice of a priest who says "don't buy it". But the approach of our sellers must be VERY modest and friendly.[54]

Pat Devine, a prominent CPGB and Connolly Association member also approached by Pollitt, urged the CPGB to ensure that Catholic anti-communist clerics from the Pope down 'be exposed and denounced in our press and by our speakers'. Alongside this, he emphasised that instances of cooperation between the Church and communist governments in Eastern Europe's 'new democracies' be highlighted. Devine also urged that the Church's attempt to claim ownership of Connolly's name be challenged, recommending that the CPGB publish extracts from the Irish Catholic press in 1916 'showing how they called for Jim Connolly's life'.[55]

These debates influenced the editorial policy of the *Democrat*, which serialised *Labour, Nationality and Religion* over several issues in 1949.[56] The *Democrat* also adopted a more confrontational attitude towards clerical criticism it received, to the dismay of the cautious Greaves. While it devoted a single sentence to Bishop O'Neill of Limerick's condemnation of the Association in March 1948, which merely noted his statement dispassionately,[57] a full page was set aside to respond to Bishop Browne of Galway's similar condemnation the following November, largely at the instigation of Pat Dooley, who, according to Greaves' account, convinced the *Democrat*'s editorial board to outvote him on the matter.[58] In the article, headed 'My Lord Bishop', the paper emphatically insisted it had consistently supported Irish neutrality, and dismissed as disingenuous Browne's criticism of the Association's choice of name, noting that Connolly had had to write *Labour, Nationality and Religion* to rebuff clerical condemnations of socialism in his own era. It also queried Browne's criticism of the Association's opposition to the Marshall Plan, given that the racist intimidation of the Ku Klux Klan and the anti-trade union Taft-Hartley Act both existed in the United States.[59] The letter prompted a remarkable direct exchange between the *Democrat* and Browne; when the west of Ireland Bishop wrote a letter to the *Democrat* repeating his earlier criticisms, the paper published it alongside a lengthy rebuttal from its Editorial Board which curtly informed Browne and his colleagues that 'the pulpit is not the place for politics'.[60]

While Browne's letters to the *Democrat* were trumpeted by Catholics in Britain and Ireland, his claim that 'socialist beliefs were incompatible with

Catholic faith' in his exchanges with the *Democrat* were later deployed in CPGB attempts to refute Catholic anti-communism in Britain, notably against the Scottish Tory anti-communist Colm Brogan. Gallacher, in a pamphlet challenging Brogan's arguments published by the CPGB's Scottish Committee in 1949, claimed that 'the Bishop of Galway is much more frank than you or other anti-communist Catholics in this country, and, while you are prepared to accept your politics from the Vatican State … you should be the last man to indulge in a nonsensical sneer about "orders from Moscow"'.[61] Pollitt used the quote from Gallacher's pamphlet in 1951 at a Cambridge Union debate with Brogan on the motion 'the time has come to ban the Communist Party'. The motion was heavily defeated, Pollitt subsequently telling Gallacher that Browne's statement had helped convince Labour supporters to oppose the motion.[62]

Douglas Hyde and British Catholic opposition to the Connolly Association

In Britain, Douglas Hyde, a former news editor at the CPGB's *Daily Worker* whose conversion to Catholicism in 1948 made him an internationally known anti-communist propagandist, was a prominent English lay Catholic opponent of the Connolly Association. The journalistic output of Bristol-born Hyde—who was no relation of his better known Irish namesake Douglas Hyde, the leading Gaelic Revivalist and first President of Ireland—dealt extensively with British communism's relationship with the Irish community from an early stage. In a July 1949 article, for instance, he claimed in the *Catholic Herald* that several leading British communists, including Douglas Garman and Paul Berridge of the London CPGB, George Sinfield, the *Daily Worker*'s industrial correspondent, and Sam Aaronovitch of the CPGB's Colonial Department, had all visited Ireland in recent months. Hyde argued that the only people who showed an interest in Irish people coming to Britain were 'the members of the crypto-Communist Connolly Association selling their papers outside the church or cathedral. And all too often, too, their first friends are made in Communist circles as a consequence'.[63] Hyde's departure from the Party was taken very seriously by leading communists, Devine telling Pollitt that 'we should not underestimate the effect Hyde's stuff is having'.[64] In the 1950s, Hyde built links with Irish Columban priests sent to Britain to minister amongst the

Irish community, with the Order's Irish head, Fr Timothy Connolly, writing to him in 1955, to praise a *Catholic Herald* column Hyde had written criticising the Connolly Association. Hyde noted in response that he felt it important that the communist nature of the Connolly Association be repeatedly emphasised, claiming that the *Irish Democrat* was being sold outside many churches in Britain, with permission granted by parish priests ignorant of its politics. Hyde agreed to meet with Fr Aedan McGrath, a prominent Columban in Britain, alongside other Columban priests sent by McQuaid to London in 1955 to discuss their efforts to combat communism. He offered to help McGrath combat the Connolly Association 'some more through my column if we can work out some kind of campaign'.[65]

The presence of Irish Catholics in the communist movement in Britain was a recurring theme of Hyde's talks in Ireland, which received attention in both the national press and prominent provincial newspapers. Indicative of this is Hyde's February 1956 speaking tour of Northern Ireland, during which he met Cardinal D'Alton in Armagh.[66] Hyde gave a lecture on 'Why men become communists' in the Parochial Hall in Armagh on the culmination of the speaking tour. Hyde commenced the talk by dramatically claiming that 'at almost exactly the precise time that I am speaking to you here' a meeting was taking place in Marx House, the CPGB's London headquarters, of:

> all those communists who are working among Irish workers in Britain, and it is unique because it is intended as a prelude to the biggest campaign the Party has yet organised to convert Irish workers in Britain to communism. The Connolly Association is being represented there.

Hyde argued that if the proposed drive came about 'large numbers of Irish workers would then be returning to Ireland. The Party wishes to ensure that among them will be a high proportion of Communists'. The meeting was reported the following day by Ireland's three Dublin-based national newspapers, the *Irish Times, Irish Independent* and *Irish Press*, as well as Cork's leading newspaper, the *Cork Examiner*.[67]

As Brian McKenzie has discussed in the context of Ireland, a prominent theme of anti-communist propaganda during the Cold War, both on the island and internationally, was the ideology's perceived threat to youth.[68] This is reflected in Hyde's propagandist activities. Addressing a 'full house attendance' in Crescent College, a Jesuit secondary school in Limerick City,

in 1957, Hyde warned that 'it required good courage to be a good Catholic in England as the climate of opinion was different there'. He painted lapsed Catholics as being susceptible to communist recruitment, as 'anybody who lost their religion was living in a vacuum and the self-consciousness within him sought a faith'. Having previously mentioned that 'the average age of a communist party member in Britain … was under 28 years', Hyde warned, in response to an audience question on the Connolly Association, that 'any Irish boys and girls going to Britain should beware of the Connolly Association. The name of Connolly … was revered in Ireland, but over in Britain it was used in a different context'. The meeting concluded with the city's mayor, Ald G. E. Russell, proposing a vote of thanks, and the *Limerick Leader*, County Limerick's main newspaper, gave Hyde's talk prominence on the front page the following day.[69]

Archbishop John Charles Mcquaid and Catholic opposition to the Connolly Association

The fate of the Irish Catholic community in Britain—particularly as it became clear that members of the Irish community were not returning home after the war—and the presence of communism in Ireland were two leading anxieties for Archbishop John Charles McQuaid of Dublin in the era, and they saw much overlap. Delaney notes that 'McQuaid's modus operandi in all aspects of his authoritarian episcopacy was to draw on an extensive network of loyal and trusted individuals, both clerical and lay, to gather detailed information before embarking on a new initiative, or making a significant decision'. During the post-war period, a number of Irish priests and lay Catholic activists in Britain reported directly to McQuaid, who took a leading role, in cooperation with bishops on both sides of the Irish Sea, in organising missions amongst the Irish community in Britain.[70]

In selecting priests to minister to Britain's Irish, McQuaid placed high priority on the need to counter the perceived danger of communism. It was no coincidence that he selected Aedan McGrath, a member of the missionary Columban Order who had been imprisoned by China's communist government for promoting the Legion of Mary, a noted lay Catholic organisation, to head the Legion's efforts amongst Britain's Irish community. Writing to Cardinal Griffin in 1955, McQuaid noted that,

> because of his extraordinary knowledge of the communist technique, Father McGrath could counter the activity of the Connolly Clubs. These agencies are, in considerable part, responsible for alienating our people from the clergy and are working, we know specifically, on city and town emigrants to prepare them for agitation in England, and when occasion will demand in Ireland.[71]

Communism joined other perceived moral threats, notably alcoholism, as a theme of reports sent back to Dublin by Britain-based members of the Legion of Mary, a lay Catholic organisation founded in 1921. A young Legionary, Hubert Daly, sent a report to Legion of Mary founder Frank Duff in 1954 reporting that he had met a Brother Coyle, an Irish priest ministering at Highgate Hospital in London, 'who was not unacquainted with activities of Irishmen in the Communist Party here: I may even be able to contact a few of these through him'. Coyle warned that the prospect of members of the Connolly Clubs infiltrating the Irish Anti-Partition League was a particular danger.[72] Daly went on to attend meetings of the Association in Hyde Park, noting after a conversation with some of their members that 'in spite of their plea that the movement is not Communist-inspired, it is quite evident that these Irishmen are communists'.[73] According to a 1956 report by Fr. John Casey, an Irish priest active with the Legion in London, 'as all types of people seem now to be aware of its evils' meetings held by the Legion on the subject would now go straight to discussing 'the answer to communism'.[74]

Contemporaneously, McQuaid and his Archdiocese were collating material on the communist movement in Ireland itself. This monitoring culminated in the setting up of a Vigilance Committee composed by the Archdiocese of Dublin in 1954 specifically to gather intelligence on communist activity. The Connolly Association was an abiding concern of the Vigilance Committee throughout its existence. Of a surviving list of 38 entries on leading Irish communists in McQuaid's papers compiled in the late fifties, at least 21 were members of the Connolly Association, with Greaves, Patrick Clancy, Pat Devine and General Secretary Éamon Lyons being amongst the most notable figures mentioned.[75] The Vigilance Committee also tracked visits to Ireland of individual Connolly Association activists like Lyons, who was alleged to have spoken at a public meeting in Abbey Street after returning from Britain to Dublin in December 1957. Lyons' mother was a devout Catholic, the report noted.[76]

The leading source of information on the Association was the *Irish Democrat*, which the Archdiocese collected and forwarded to certain priests entrusted with monitoring 'subversive literature' such as Committee member Fr. Clarke, who was forwarded copies of the *Democrat* from 1961 onwards.[77] These copies of the *Democrat* were also drawn upon for polemical attacks on the Association. When Columban priest Michael O'Neill indicated in 1960 that he wished to write an article on the Connolly Association's communist links for the journal *Pagan Missions*, McQuaid's secretary, emphasising 'the need for security consciousness', instructed O'Neill that he should 'quote only published sources' rather than the Church's own anti-communist reports, and forwarded him copies of the *Democrat* and the IWL's periodical, the *Irish Workers' Voice*.[78]

In 1960, McQuaid received a note from his secretary which claimed, based on the *Democrat*'s August 1960 issue, that the Connolly Association had hired Anthony Coughlan, *a Cork-born Connolly Association activist*, as a full-time organiser, reportedly a sign it was becoming 'more organised'. The note recommended that O'Neill and Edward McElroy, another Columban priest in Britain, be contacted along with McGrath 'to do something to counter this campaign', McQuaid recommending that McElroy be contacted for his assessment.[79] McElroy assured McQuaid that the Connolly Association's strength should not be exaggerated and that the Columbans in Britain were closely monitoring the situation: 'It is quite true that they remain very active, and it is also true that their activities have pepped up a little—not all that much'. Throughout this period, Coughlan was a figure singled out for surveillance. Úna Byrne, an important lay informer on communist activity for McQuaid, forwarded a picture of Coughlan obtained from the *Irish Democrat* to the Archbishop, identifying him as 'a member of the C.P. Sub-editor *Daily Worker* and *Irish Democrat*. Prime mover in Connolly Clubs'.[80] Byrne regularly noted Coughlan's visits to former Connolly Association figures in Ireland, such as Roy Johnston, a physicist and IWL member who was later an important figure in the IRA's move to the left in the 1960s, and Justin Keating, an IWL activist who later disowned communism and was a Labour Party cabinet minister in Liam Cosgrave's 1973–1977 Fine Gael/Labour government.[81] On a later occasion in 1961 Byrne informed McQuaid that Coughlan had recently met Keating, Michael O'Leary of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, a Mr Igoe, Staff Officer of Trinity College, Ann Simms, a nuclear disarmament

activist who had allegedly studied in Moscow, and George Jeffares and Séan Nolan of the IWL.[82] Byrne later reported that Coughlan was returning to Dublin, and had obtained a post in Trinity College through Igoe.[83] McQuaid subsequently wrote to Bishop Lucey of Cork asking for information on Coughlan, a graduate of University College Cork, noting he was now active in Dublin in the 1913 Club and in nuclear disarmament activism.[84] Lucey was evidently already aware of Coughlan, remarking in 1961 that the Association 'has as its whole-time organiser a Cork man. He is not the only Cork man high up in the Association'.[85]

Conclusion

As was to be expected during the Cold War, Irish anti-communism was inherently transnational in nature. Events such as the house arrests of Cardinal Mindszenty and Archbishop Stepinac by the post-war communist governments of Hungary and Yugoslavia respectively, the emphasis the Holy See placed on anti-communism, and, in an Anglophone context, the campaigns of Catholic anti-communists in the United States, all contributed to passionate anti-communist reactions from Catholics on the island. Enda Delaney's statement that anti-communist concerns were primarily directed 'at people and forms of cultural production from across the Atlantic'[86] underplays the fact that Britain was arguably as or more important to the Irish Catholic anti-communist imagination. On a practical level, this was because the CPGB was much larger and active than either the Communist Party of Northern Ireland or the Irish Workers' League, its counterpart in the rest of the island. More broadly, communism was not just regarded as a political ideology antagonistic to the Church, but as a moral threat which threatened to infect the Irish in Britain, and, by extension, potentially the Irish at home. This fed into broader insecurities within the Church about the moral condition of the Irish in Britain relating to alcoholism, sexual immorality and other concerns particularly acute during the early Cold War, as Ireland's economic woes contributed to large-scale emigration to Britain, particularly in the 1950s. The concerns the Connolly Association prompted also illustrate the fear amongst Irish Catholic anti-communists that both the historical memory of James Connolly and enduring grievances over the partition of Ireland could be used by the far-left to win support.

This concern did not just exist in Ireland, as the article has shown. Concerns that the Irish were susceptible to being infected by communism were also evident within the Church in England, Scotland and Wales. This was particularly evident within the pages of the *Catholic Herald* and in the writings and activism of Douglas Hyde. As the rhetoric of the Catholic Church increasingly became a practical barrier to the CPGB and its activities, Catholic anti-communism, and the need to rebut it, became a matter of acute importance to its leadership, and the Irish community was a major focus of that discussion. For Catholics on both islands, the Irish in Britain were a group who were particularly perceived as being at risk of falling into a life of immorality, and, amidst the broader atmosphere of the Cold War, communism, in the image of the Connolly Association, was seen as being in a prime position to exploit the perceived vulnerability of the Church in this regard.

Notes

1. Keogh, "Ireland, the Vatican and the Cold War: the case of Italy, 1948," 67–114.
2. Cronin, *Washington's Irish policy*, 229–30.
3. Kirby, *Religion and the Cold War*.
4. Kirby, "The religious Cold War, 540–64; and Kosicki, "The Catholic Church and the Cold War." 259–72.
5. Delaney, "Anti-communism in mid-twentieth century Ireland," 878–903; McFarland and Johnston, "The Church of Scotland's special commission on communism," 337–61; and Jones, "The clergy, the Cold War and the mission of the local Church: England ca. 1945–60," 188–99.
6. Delaney, *The Irish in post-war Britain*, 160–1.
7. Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, *Handbook for the Catholic Emigrant to England*, 20.
8. *Irish Freedom*, February 1942; *Irish Democrat*, January 1949; Greaves. *Reminiscences of the Connolly Association*. 17–8; and Goldstone, "Leslie Daiken and Harry Kernoff," 201.
9. *Irish Freedom*, February 1940.
10. Coughlan, *C. Desmond Greaves*, 3–4.
11. Greaves, *Reminiscences of the Connolly Association*, 18.
12. *Irish Freedom*, April 1944.
13. *Irish Freedom*, February 1943.
14. *Irish Freedom*, May 1943.
15. Ó Drisceoil, *Censorship in Ireland*, 197.
16. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, 127.
17. *Irish Freedom*, January 1939; *Catholic Herald*, 10 February, 24 February, 3 March 1939; and Mentioned in Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in Inter-War England,* 266.
18. See note 14 above, 1939.
19. *Irish Freedom*, January 1940.
20. See note 14 above, 1941.
21. *Catholic Herald*, 14 February 1941.

22. *Irish Freedom*, March 1941.
23. *Standard*, 17 December 1943.
24. *Irish Independent*, 9 November 1948; *Cork Examiner*, 10 November 1948; *Connacht Tribune*, 13 November 1948.
25. *Limerick Leader*, 9 February 1948.
26. *Irish Press*, 23 April 1956.
27. *Irish Press*, 13 February, 1956.
28. *Cork Examiner*, 23 April 1956.
29. *Cork Examiner*, 17 April 1961.
30. Aspden, *Fortress Church*, 273–5.
31. Morgan, Cohen, and Flinn, *Communists and British Society*, 185.
32. See note 30 above, 275.
33. Morgan, "Douglas Hyde—Campaigner and Journalist," 162–6.
34. Morgan, Cohen, and Flinn, *Communists and British Society*, 196–202.
35. Smylie, "Cold War, Partition and Convergence," 113.
36. People's History Museum, Manchester, (hereafter PHM) CPGB papers, CP/CENT/PC/02/File 14, Political Committee, 'The Situation in Ireland, 30/4/'53'.
37. Johnston, *Century of Endeavour,* 167.
38. Smylie, "Cold War, Partition and Convergence," 121–2.
39. For a biography of Dillon, see Manning, *James Dillon*.
40. James Dillon, Dáil Debates, 106, no. 19, cols. 2332–3, 20 June, 1947. Accessed 19 November 2017. Available from: http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/DebatesWebPack.nsf/takes/dail1947062000005?opendocument.
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42. *Irish Democrat*, August 1947.
43. Liam Cosgrave, Dáil Debates, 147, no. 4, col. 454–6, 27 November, 1954. Accessed 19 November 2017.Available from http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/DebatesWebPack.nsf/takes/dail1954111000054?opendocument.
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45. Treacy, *The IRA 1956–69*, 74.
46. *Communist Review*, January 1947.
47. Gallagher, *Glasgow: An Uneasy Peace*. 230.
48. PHM, CPGB archives, folder CP/IND/POLL/9/15, letter from Harry Pollitt to Harry McShane, 26 April, 1948.
49. PHM, CPGB archives, folder CP/IND/POLL/9/15, letter from Seán O'Casey to Harry Pollitt, 26 April, 1948.
50. Krause, *The letters of Seán O'Casey, 1942–54*, 520–1.
51. Connolly, *Labour, Nationality and Religion*, iii.
52. Krause, *The Letters of Seán O'Casey, 1942–54*, 541.
53. Coughlan, *C. Desmond Greaves*, 6.
54. PHM, CPGB archives, folder CP/IND/POLL/9/15, letter from C. Desmond Greaves to Harry Pollitt, 28 April 1948.

55. PHM, CPGB archives, folder CP/IND/POLL/9/15, letter from Pat Devine to Harry Pollitt, undated.
56. For examples, see *Irish Democrat*, June 1949, November 1949.
57. *Irish Democrat*, March 1948.
58. Greaves, *Reminiscences of the Connolly Association*, 24–5.
59. *Irish Democrat*, January 1949. For a longer discussion of the ensuing controversy, see Madden, "Bishop Michael Browne of Galway and Anti-Communism," 26–7.
60. See note 57 above, 1949.
61. Gallacher, *Mr. Brogan Opens Wide His Mouth,* 12.
62. PHM, CPGB archives, folder CP/IND/POLL/3/7, letter from Harry Pollitt to Willie Gallacher, 25 April 1951.
63. *Tuam Herald*, 15 July 1949; *Tuam Herald*, 22 July 1949.
64. PHM, CPGB archives, CP/IND/POLL/9/15, letter from Pat Devine to Harry Pollitt, undated.
65. Dublin Diocesan Archives, (hereafter DDA) AB8/B/XXIII/743, letter from Douglas Hyde to Timothy Connolly, 9 August 1955.
66. *Irish Times*, 18 February 1956.
67. *Irish Independent*, 20 February 1956. Also see *Cork Examiner*, 20 February 1956; *Irish Press*, 20 February 1956; *Irish Times*, 20 February 1956.
68. MacKenzie, 'The American Youth Campaign in Ireland," 355–72.
69. *Limerick Leader*, 11 February 1957.
70. Delaney, *The Irish in Post-War Britain*, 137–41.
71. DDA, AB8/B/XXI/79/32/38, letter from John Charles McQuaid to Cardinal Bernard Griffin, 22 January 1955.
72. DDA, AB8/B/XXI/79/32/11, letter from Hubert Daly to Frank Duff, 25 July, 1954. For examples from Daly's reports of matters of sexual immorality, and broader examples of McQuaid's contacts in Britain, see Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, 278–84.
73. DDA, AB8/B/XXI/79/32/12, letter from Hubert Daly to Frank Duff, 5 August 1954.
74. DDA, AB8/B/XXI/79/32/12, report by Fr. John Casey, November 1956.
75. DDA, AB8/B/XXIII/738, entries on Irish communists.
76. DDA, AB8/B/XXIII/70, Vigilance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, 9 February, 1959.
77. DDA, AB8/B/XXIII/764, note to McQuaid, 10 November 1960.
78. DDA, AB8/B/XXIII/98, note to McQuaid, 28 Novemberd 1961.
79. DDA, AB8/B/XXIII/762, note to McQuaid.
80. DDA, AB8/B/XXIII/481, undated note from Byrne to McQuaid's Secretary.
81. DDA, AB8/B/XXIII/454, undated note from Byrne to McQuaid's secretary. Johnston, *Century of Endeavour*; and Hussey and Kealy, *Nothing is Written in Stone*.
82. DDA, AB8/B/XXIII/469, note from Byrne to McQuaid's Secretary, 6 September, 1961.
83. DDA, AB8/B/XXIII/468, undated note from Byrne to McQuaid's Secretary.
84. DDA, AB8/B/XXIII/329, letter from Archbishop McQuaid to Bishop Lucey, 1 November 1961.
85. See note 29 above, 1961.
86. Delaney, "Anti-Communism in Mid-Twentieth Century Ireland," 885.

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Two flags in the sand: anti-Communism in early Cold War Northern Ireland

Stephen J. Goss

ABSTRACT
This article reveals how the Cold War impinged upon not just national, but local political considerations and became woven into communal narratives. It contributes to the examination of religion in the conflict, adds to the historiography of Britain and the Cold War, and provides a context by which British Cold War experience and responses can be assessed. With Northern Ireland's political similarities to Great Britain, its consistency with European norms and its overlaps with popular sentiment in the United States, Northern Ireland offers a gauge to better understand the nature of anti-Communism in the Cold War's first decade and offers an unexplored perspective on the conflict.

The first decade following the end of the Second World War began with hopeful aspirations for a peaceful future. However, the optimistic expectation that the war-time alliance between Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union could be maintained to ensure peace quickly dissipated, to be replaced by fear and suspicion. This Cold War, and an associated apprehension (or anticipation) of the spread of Communism and the malign influence of the Soviet Union, is most notable in the United States, and consequently it has received the most attention. Yet, deep-rooted anxiety about the threat posed by Soviet-backed Communism permeated Western society as a whole. It became an element in the political and cultural consciousness of Western Europe in particular, which felt itself on the frontline of the confrontation with the Communist East.[1]

This article will address the implications of this 'Red Scare' on Northern Ireland during the initial decade of the Cold War. By doing so, it will demonstrate how the tense international situation impinged upon local concerns in the West. In addition, it will provide an insight into the impact of the Cold War upon a divided society and reveal how global concerns became woven into parochial narratives during the conflict. Finally, it will add to the growing historiography around the British response to the Cold War which has not yet been fully explored.[2]

Focusing on the first decade of the Cold War covers the emergence of the 'Red Scare' and facilitates examination of the period in the early 1950s when anti-Communism was at its most severe.[3] Attention will be given to the government, political parties and the principal religious denominations

so as to provide an encompassing study of attitudes towards the Communist threat. The contemporaneous situation in Great Britain will be used to contextualise developments in Northern Ireland so as to establish the extent to which, given its distinctive nature, it conformed with the rest of the UK. Such was the general cognisance of the Cold War and an associated fear of the reach of the Soviet Union, that it became natural for the state, political parties and churches to address it—and very easy for parties to exploit it. Just as British Labour had to contend with the accusation of Communist association or infiltration, so too did the various manifestations of Labour in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland both unionists and nationalists took a stand against Communism. While united in using it to deter their traditional vote-base from switching to Labour, their arguments against Communism were the mirror images of each other. Beyond contending Northern Ireland corresponded to Great Britain politically, this article will discuss the extent to which the Northern Irish response conformed to European attitudes in the period, and whether 'McCarthyism', which was viewed with concern and disdain on the Continent and in Great Britain, made any in roads in Northern Ireland; given the emotional, fundamentally partisan nature of politics there.

While examining anti-Communism from an explicitly Marxist perspective, Miliband and Liebman nonetheless present a comprehensive and dispassionate delineation of the concept. In their *Reflections on Anti-Communism*, they assert that it stems from two underlying assumptions: that Communism is an inherent evil and an anathema, and that the ideology is propagated by the USSR with the intention of imposing it globally.[4] As early as 1947–1948, both the American and British governments were shifting to overt policy along these lines; with the Truman Doctrine and the involvement of both countries in the Greek Civil War. In Britain, anti-Communism was also pursued more circumspectly; notably with the conference of Commonwealth security services representatives hosted by Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee in October 1948. Amongst discussions on general measures to counter Soviet infiltration in the dominions, the nefarious activities of Communist parties (particularly in regard to industry) were addressed.[5] As the 1940s drew to a close, the US and British governments became increasingly concerned by the threat posed both internationally and domestically by Soviet Communism.[6]

The international situation compounded these concerns: the Berlin Blockade, the establishment of Soviet puppet regimes in Eastern Europe, the strength of the Communists in the Italian general election of 1948, and the outbreak of the Korean War. At the same time, the unearthing of Soviet spies such as Alan Nunn May, Klaus Fulks and the Rosenbergs left the British and American governments—as well as their respective populations—nervous and suspicious about the destabilising threat posed by 'the Reds'. As the West increasingly seemed incapable of containing the propagation of Soviet Communism abroad, never mind forcing it onto the back-foot, a home front was opened up as a means of countering the apparent powerlessness.[7]

From its very inception in June 1947, the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities was convinced that the Soviet-backed Communists in Britain represented a genuine threat to national security.[8] It was in this atmosphere that the Labour government took the exceptional step of applying criminal prosecution against striking workers. In August 1950 the leaders of the unofficial North Thames Gas Board strike were convicted out of a fear reinforced by the Ministry of Fuel and Power that the strike—like the docks strike of the previous year—was the product of Communist agitation.[9] The cabinet had come to accept that the threat of Communist subversion highlighted by MI5 was genuine, and in the event of war, Special Branch was tasked with destroying the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) apparatus across the country.[10]

Similarly in Northern Ireland, known or suspected Communists were kept under surveillance, should the need to detain them arise. Since its creation with the partition of Ireland in 1920, Northern Ireland was formally an integral part of the United Kingdom, but in reality a place apart. The grandiose structures which underpinned its self-government made Northern Ireland a quasi-dominion: with the trappings of statehood comparable with Canada or Australia, yet a government in Belfast constrained in its powers and resolved to emulate the actions of Westminster as closely as possible. From the earliest days of the state, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) would send detectives to attend Communist meetings and take notes on the speeches. A full report was then submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs (later the Ministry of Public Security).[11] By the 1940s, the Ministry of Home Affairs was classing Communists as potentially as subversive as the

IRA and eager to prosecute those engaging in anti-War propaganda. RUC assertions the agitators were inconsequential and the Attorney General's advice it would be difficult to do and not worth the effort, were disregarded.[12] Consequently, given the anxiety in Whitehall by the late 1940s over Communist subversion, it is unsurprising that the RUC co-operated with MI5 in identifying and monitoring Communist activists across Northern Ireland. MI5 kept a file on Communist activist and secretary to the Belfast and District Trades Union Council, Betty Sinclair. She had worked in Moscow for two years (1933–1935), having been previously a supporter of the Irish Workers' Revolutionary Party and was gaoled for sedition in 1941 after writing an article sympathetic to the IRA. In the case of Sinclair, her letters were read and copied, her movements observed, public utterances recorded and her background thoroughly researched.[13] Similarly, Desmond Greaves, leader of the Connolly Association—an Irish Communist organisation in Great Britain—was also kept under surveillance in the 1950s. The same methods were applied in observing him for his supposed associations with Communists and the Communist Party in Great Britain. The RUC provided MI5 with a list of known Communists in Northern Ireland and kept the Northern Ireland Communist Party (NICP) under observation in the 1940s and early 1950s.[14]

Conservatives and Unionists: united against Communism

From its establishment until the prorogation of its parliament in 1972, Northern Ireland was governed by the Ulster Unionist Party. A coalition of all elements in society committed to maintaining the constitutional link between Great Britain and the north eastern portion of Ireland which became Northern Ireland, the Ulster Unionists had been united with the Conservatives since a real threat of Irish separation had emerged in the early part of the twentieth century. The connexion was subsequently maintained out of mutual convenience: the Unionists retained allies happy to defend Northern Ireland's Britishness from its Irish nationalist challenge, and until the early 1970s, all Ulster Unionist Members of Parliament (MPs) at Westminster accepted the Conservative Party whip, and as a matter of course, took the Conservative Party line on major policy issues.[15] So close was the working relationship in Parliament that the Ulster Unionists have been described as 'indistinguishable' from their Conservative partners.[16]

Consistently at the general elections into the 1950s, Ulster Unionists remained vociferous in identifying themselves with the Conservatives.[17] However, the Conservatives began to view the Ulster Unionist insecurity about Northern Ireland's constitutional position as a bizarre anachronism.[18] Unionists were also suspicious of state intervention and planning and remained fixated on the monarchy and Protestantism; while the Conservatives had moved on to reflect the changing nature of post-war British society.[19] This meant that antipathy to left-wing politics increasingly formed the basis of the sister parties' unity, as the longer established basis for their association—maintaining the integrity of the UK—became less relevant. As the Cold War emerged, hostility towards Labour policy and a related fear of the spread of Communism helped to maintain the relationship between the two parties as they otherwise drifted apart. During a cabinet discussion on the extent of the link, Northern Irish Prime Minister and Ulster Unionist leader Sir Basil Brooke stated in a memorandum:

> It must be recognised that the electorate who sent them to Westminster and who maintain our Party in power at Stormont regard Unionism and Conservatism as almost synonymous: the Ulster members have, in the main, been elected on an anti-Socialist platform.[20]

It is therefore unsurprising that the Unionists would have fought the 1945 general election on an intensely anti-Socialist line, stressing the risks Labour's belief in nationalisation and state planning posed to industry in Northern Ireland.[21] The *Belfast Telegraph*, one of the principal unionist dailies, published an editorial during the 1945 Northern Irish election warning against the temptation of voting for the left. It advised: 'a direct threat to freedom, therefore, is this alluring Socialist gospel of "abundance for all". Even were it attainable the price should be born in mind' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 5 June 1945). The *Fermanagh Times* asked its readers, 'did Fermanagh farmers hear on the wireless the election speech of the Rt. Hon Thomas Johnson, Labour Minister for Scotland, who said it was part of the Labour policy to have all the land owned by the state? Does this policy appeal to any of the farming electors in Fermanagh and Tyrone?' (*Fermanagh Times*, 14 June 1945). On which rhetorical basis the newspaper had no qualms about endorsing the two Unionist candidates and the Conservatives in the election. This highlights unionism's inherent antithesis to Socialism. Indeed, by 1946, concern at emulating Westminster's Labour government resulted in unionist back-benchers and constituency

organisations forming a campaign for dominion status to 'save Ulster from "creeping Socialism"'.[22]

Building on these sentiments, Brooke frequently relied upon the threat of Communism as a rallying point for supporters. In an address following the 1945 general election, Brooke praised the unionists of Northern Ireland for returning the Official Unionists at the election despite the efforts of the Nationalists and the fact that 'Socialists and Communists tried to bring about a big swing-over to the left'.[23] In a statement to cross-Channel newspapers and press agencies, Brooke claimed the loss of two unionist seats to the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) was due to 'exaggerated fears of "mass unemployment" consequent on the ending of the war in Europe'.[24] He accused left-wing organisations of scaremongering and exploiting the fears of the electorate during their campaign.

Such sentiments had been reflected in Unionist campaigning for the election across Northern Ireland. Brooke told voters Communism was 'the most fatal thing in the world' and warned the electorate, 'if they were prepared to give up their liberties then they should go and vote Socialist' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 8 June 1945). This emphasis on liberties is noteworthy, not only as a thread running through unionist denunciations of Communism, but because of similarity with the line adopted by the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland.

Lord Glentoran, standing in the Bloomfield Division of East Belfast, ran advertisements in the *Belfast Telegraph* reading: 'Glentoran for Bloomfield loyalist and anti-Communist' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 6 June 1945). Speaking in support at a rally, Senator Gerald Browne said 'the Communist Party in Great Britain would hand Ulster over to de Valera if they had the power'. He warned McCullough (Glentoran's Communist opponent) should not be underestimated as he would 'receive the solid support of all the enemies of Unionist principles' (*Belfast Telegraph* 5 June 1945). Later in the campaign, Browne also warned 'it was evident that a frontal Communist and Socialist attack was being made on Ulster' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 12 June 1945). The press coverage reports that these assertions were greeted with applause or approval from the crowds and clearly demonstrates Unionists used Communism as a bogeyman—not only in of itself, but linking it with Irish nationalism. The message was clear: backing the Ulster Unionists could stop Communism and with it Irish unity. Minister of Finance, Maynard Sinclair, condemned Communism on the basis it was godless, totalitarian

(he compared it with Nazism) and devastating for small businessmen. Sinclair urged unionists to vote solidly, saying 'a vote not cast was really equal to one for the Communist Party' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 9 June 1945). Such alarmism fell on receptive ears; S.E. Maitland, the Communist candidate for West Down was prevented from holding a rally in Rathfriland due to hostility from the crowd. He was pelted with eggs and had to be escorted away under police protection (*Belfast Telegraph*, 7 June 1945).

By the time of the next election in Northern Ireland, called in 1949 following Éire's repeal of the External Relations Act, there was a demonstrable shift in the rhetoric employed. While the overriding issue was reiterating loyalty in response to the declaration of the Republic of Ireland, international events did influence the narrative. Noticeably, Nazi references began to be replaced with comparisons to the Soviet Union. Whereas the 1945 elections had seen allusions such as Unionist candidate for North Belfast W.F. Neil claiming 'Labour was no better than Nazism' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 26 June 1945), by 1949 the USSR and events in Eastern Europe were becoming the benchmark of iniquity. Referring to Éire's decision to leave the Commonwealth, Unionist Chief Whip W.W.B. Topping told an election rally 'this highly objectionable action savours of the methods of the Russian Communists when seeking to gain control in another country' (*Northern Whig*, 27 January 1949). Referring to the Anti-Partition Fund collected south of the border in support of Nationalist candidates in Northern Ireland, Brooke asked a crowd in Ballynahinch 'isn't there something familiar about all this? Haven't we heard of their tactics being used before? Doesn't it recall to your minds events in Eastern Europe?' (*Northern Whig*, 3 February 1949).

As Nazism gave way to Soviet-backed Communism as the threat to the free West, unionist fears of Communism and suspicion of Irish nationalism came conveniently together towards the end of the 1940s, as both simultaneously appeared to be on the march. Future Prime Minister of Northern Ireland Brian Faulkner told voters in East Down that:

> Ulster is threatened by the forces of Irish republicanism…she is also threatened by international Communism, by men without any Christian background… against them we must all stand united.

Faulkner explicitly linked religion and politics, not only by specifically denouncing Communists as un-Christian, but by drawing on an idea that

‘our bulwark in the past was our firm religious belief’ (*Northern Whig*, 27 January 1949). Just to reinforce this message, Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke—War-time Chief of the Imperial General Staff and uncle of the serving Prime Minister—told an Ulster Unionist lunch in the Ulster Hall that there should be ‘a strengthening of the bonds that bind the British Isles and Commonwealth as one of the major movements for security against the Communist menace’. He stated three things were needed to counter Communism: spiritual revival across the British Isles, western Europe and Christian countries; British economic recovery; and a strengthening of the bonds uniting the Commonwealth. Commenting on Éire becoming a republic, he lamented, ‘it is almost inconceivable that any member of that fraternity [*British Isles*] should risk its own security and the security of others by seeking to impair any of the bonds which tie it to these islands’. Referring to Northern Ireland’s commitment and crucial role in the war, he said ‘I thank God that in any future conflict that might be the case again’. Finally, alluding to the Stormont election results he concluded Northern Ireland’s steadfastness to the UK was ‘going to do a great deal, I feel, towards the security of these islands here as an emblem at present of loyalty to the Commonwealth as a whole and a great advantage to the security of the world in the future’ (*Fermanagh Times*, 24 February 1949).

By the late 1940s the Ulster Unionist message was evolving: the Ulster Unionists were still the buttress against insidious Communism and the one safeguard against a resurgent nationalist threat. Protestant faith, long employed in the arguments about the latter, was increasingly thrown in to the narrative which claimed the Ulster Unionists were the only thing standing between Soviet Communism and their proxy in Labour or republicanism—or at worst a combination of both.

With the outbreak of the Korean War, anti-Communism became all the more strident, and the emerging theme of linking republicanism and Christianity with it became more vociferous. As the 1950 Westminster election approached, the *Derry Standard* drew attention to the fact that the only party in Great Britain which had included Ireland in its manifesto was the Communist Party:

> The anti-partitionists [are] dependant only on their own weak right arm and Communism… They have advocated, or rather demanded, the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland and the ending of partition. That would entail, of course, the use of force and the

> shedding of blood, but such trivialities would not likely cause the average Communist any loss of sleep.

The editorial then tentatively posed the question of how different Irish Labour were from the Communists across the North Channel (*Derry Standard*, 23 January 1950). Lawrence Orr, standing for South Down, told a rally that the united, Socialist republican Ireland his opponent was calling for 'would mean a Communist Ireland, with the extinction of all Christianity' (*Northern Whig*, 18 February 1950). The Mid-Ulster candidate, J.M. Shearer reminded electors (highlighting how frequently the rhetoric was employed) there were many reasons for retaining the link with England: guarantees of agricultural prices for farmers; vastly superior social services; and 'the fight against Communism'. He too linked anti-partitionists with the British Communists, and asserted 'it is well known that many members of the IRA and IR Brotherhood were out-and-out Communists' (*Derry Standard*, 25 January 1950). In the marginal Fermanagh & South Tyrone constituency, Henry Richardson pointed out it was unclear whether his opponent Cahir Healey would take his seat if elected. If he did, 'with whom then would he vote? The Communists? And are they his side?' (*Northern Whig*, 22 February 1950). In what was a tight fight, Richardson tried to discredit his nationalist opponent by suggesting he might be a Communist, presumably hoping this suggestion, given the anti-Communist mood, would give him the advantage.

The 1951 election campaign reflected this developing mind-set, with many Conservative candidates in Great Britain addressing the Communist menace. Right across the country warnings were issued about the threat posed, with similar assertions that only the Conservatives were able to resist. In Totnes Sir Ralph Rayner wrote, 'we are to do our share towards preventing the flames of Communism from spreading. If we can now localise that red and ferocious blaze, it will die down in course of time'.[25] Such language, the equal of that employed by Ulster Unionists, was common with the Conservatives, who took some stand against Communism or the Soviet Union in constituencies right across England.[26]

A number of those standing in Welsh seats took the supposed threat very seriously. Jim Bowen in Ebbw Valley asserted that Britain faced 'the brooding menace of Communism, which marshals and deploys great armies, and which drips its poison in those places in which it believes it will

best ferment'.[27] The Scottish Unionist Party (another sister party, closer to the Conservatives than the Ulster Unionists) also harangued voters on the dangers of Communism and in Glasgow Govan there was an attempt to tar Labour by association with the Communist Party.[28]

Miliband and Liebman assert a specifically conservative anti-Communism, which they describe as an absolutist position which fundamentally rejects Communism as 'the product of the darkest and most sinister impulses of the human spirit, the negation of civilisation and enlightenment'.[29] Certainly the Conservative election material from 1951 could be viewed in these terms, while preceding and concurrent Ulster Unionist election material certainly equates. In North Belfast, the Ulster Unionist candidate, Montgomery Hyde, promised to 'resist the advance of Communism, which, like Socialism, threatens individual liberties and the foundations of our Christian civilisation'.[30] Hyde followed the earlier example of combining the defence of religion with an attack on the left. In South Down, Captain Orr adopted a similar standpoint, telling voters he believed 'the greatest danger to mankind at present is the spread of atheistic Communism, and I shall do all that in me lies to combat it'.[31] Not surprisingly given his statements in previous elections, Sir Basil Brooke also expressed his concerns. In an election speech at Newcastle, Brooke referred to Churchill as 'Britain's foremost champion in the fight against Communism'. This was of course following Churchill's famous 1946 'iron curtain' speech in Fulton, Missouri. Brooke went so far as to claim:

> Today we are witnessing the insidious spread of Communism in country after country. Its withering blight is upon the European satellites. In Great Britain the political groups of the left have been penetrated by the Communists and their fellow-travellers. But the Conservative and Unionist Party is wholly free of this Communist taint.[32]

This was not quite the case, as has been revealed.[33] Yet it nonetheless demonstrates that a gross aversion to Communism featured in election campaigns in the period. Ulster Unionists managed to tie the traditional unionist narrative in with the wider Cold War situation by arguing 'Ulster is in the fight against Communism as well as in the continuing battle to preserve its own constitutional position as part of the United Kingdom and the British Empire'.[34] Brooke pointed out that—as the Second World War

had demonstrated—Northern Ireland played a significant strategic role, not only for the UK, but for the entire North Atlantic Treaty area as well.

In the other Belfast constituencies, the Ulster Unionist leader continued to attack Labour and opponents of unionism with allegations of Communist association. He claimed those suggesting a Conservative government would lead Britain into another war were in fact 'carrying on the propaganda which pours forth daily from Moscow and the Communist satellite countries. The aim of the Communists is to delude the British electorate'. Outlining the five principal advantages of unionism over nationalism, Brooke referred to the high standard of living, the NHS, economic links with Great Britain and the Commonwealth, cherished political and spiritual ideals and 'uncompromising opposition to Communism, which is the declared enemy of democratic freedom and of the Church to which most Nationalists belong'.[35] Out of seven speeches in the week leading up to the 1951 general election, Sir Basil Brooke directly dealt with global affairs, the Middle East, the UN, Communism and NATO in five of them. It is therefore clear that the Ulster Unionists used the tense international situation and the prevalent fear of Soviet Communism to further bolster the case for the link with Great Britain. Brooke's specific reference to the Catholic Church is significant. Tied in with such aspects as living standards and the NHS, it was a broad appeal emphasising why there could be no rational arguments against the union. Brooke was not alone in making such petitions; speaking at a rally for Shearer, E.T.R. Herdman, North Tyrone Unionist Association Chairman told the crowd, 'the people fighting against Communism behind the Iron Curtain were those of the Roman Catholic Church and an extraordinary thing was that the Communist Party in Britain was the only one supporting Anti-partition'. He said that Catholics should consider 'every vote cast against Mr Shearer as a stab in the back for their own people in countries like Hungary and Poland' (*Derry Standard*, 1 February 1950). This highlights that anti-Communism was woven into traditional sectarianism rather than supplanting it as the global concern was being used to undermine Irish nationalism as well as sustain unionism.

By the time of the 1953 Stormont election, the 'red scare' stirred up by United States Senator Joe McCarthy was at its pinnacle and this is reflected in the unionist campaigning message. In Bloomfield, Lord Glentoran (son of the previous incumbent), maintained his father's anti-Communist line, telling voters, that the Unionist government was setting up new factories,

while the Communists were trying to infiltrate them to cause unrest. He also referred to the forced Labour camps of the USSR (*Belfast News-letter*, 20 October 1953). The Prime Minister (now Lord Brookeborough) left no doubt about the threat, as he brought the peril home: 'the Unionist Party has been challenged from every corner—from out and out Republicans, Socialists and even Communists. Only the existence of a strong stable Unionist government supported by a united party and people will enable us to hold our position' (*Belfast News-letter*, 20 October 1953). Brookeborough played on the siege mentality which had been a feature of Ulster Protestant thinking for generations[36] to undermine any thought amongst the unionist electorate that they could safely vote for anyone else. Harry Midgley, once a thorn in the side of the Ulster Unionists—particularly after 1941 when, in one of the biggest upsets in Northern Irish politics, as a non-sectarian Labour candidate he had snatched Willowfield from the Ulster Unionists at a by-election; by 1947 he had joined the party and was serving as Minister for Education in the early 1950s.[37] While campaigning in his Willowfield seat, he told a meeting that he had encountered evidence of Communist infiltration in a number of the parents' associations that he had met with, but maintained that 'a good dose of sound Ulster-British reasoning' brought them to sense (*Belfast News-letter*, 15 October 1953). The imputation of subversion smacks of the contemporaneous McCarthyism; but the idea a stern talking to was sufficient to address it does not quite fit with the then widespread American hysteria. Regardless, Communism was a feature of the 1953 election in a variety of ways; Henry Holmes, Unionist candidate for Shankill was heckled at a rally in Bray Street with shouts of 'Harry Holmes is a Communist' (*Belfast News-letter*, 16 October 1953). This demonstrates the pejorative concept of the charge; it was clearly an accusation and a slur to unionists.

Anti-Communism amongst the Ulster Unionists went deeper than election rhetoric from the leader and candidates. The unoriginally named Unionist Society had been set up in 1942 as a ginger group to try and contribute to the direction of the Ulster Unionists and was aimed towards young people, women and ex-servicemen. In its constitution of 1951, the stated aim was 'to maintain democratic principles and by political education, counteract Communist and other subversive doctrines'.[38] In the Queen's University Unionist Association Year Book, government Chief

Whip Brian Faulkner declared the Northern Irish were ‘not Socialist in their outlook or tendencies by any manner of means. That political creed is as alien to them as is Communism’.[39]

Clearly popular dread of malign foreign Communism was appropriated and deliberately tied into the traditional narrative of Northern Irish politics. This highlights the extent to which the Cold War permeated society: it was absorbed by the populace and became inter-twined with pre-existing political disputes—in this case as an additional means of justifying the maintenance of the current constitutional arrangements. That this is a trend rather than simply a crude attempt at spin by unionists is evident from the Nationalist adoption of the same narrative. Northern Irish nationalists also vociferated taking a stand against Communism—but their argument was the mirror image of the unionists.

‘Fortress mentality’: the nationalists

Since the rise of Daniel O’Connell in the first half of the Nineteenth Century, Catholicism and Irish nationalism had been firmly linked. Disillusionment with the effects of the Act of Union spurred the campaigns for emancipation and repeal which became dominated by O’Connell, under whose influence nationalist Ireland became predominantly Catholic and developed its own identity, helping to mould the confessional basis of Irish politics which emerged.[40] It became an underlying responsibility of nationalism to protect Catholicism, notably expressed by the ‘special position’ of the Roman Catholic Church acknowledged in the 1937 Constitution of Ireland.[41] Indeed, in 1933, concerned that members were succumbing to the allure of Communism, the IRA placed new weight on a standing order prohibiting volunteers from joining the Communist Party and denounced the ideology for ‘denial of God and active hostility to religion’.[42] Furthermore, Catholics on both sides of the border had been sympathetic and supportive of General Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War. Both the Irish Catholic Church and its adherents viewed the Nationalists as a vital barrier against anti-clericalism, fearing that if a country as imbued with Catholicism as Spain could fall, Ireland may well be next. It is therefore unsurprising then that Irish volunteers for the Nationalist side outnumbered those who joined the International Brigades by a ratio of 3:1.[43] The Cold War simply strengthened this long-established Catholic anti-Communism and suspicion of the Soviet Union. Their anti-Communism was still easily aroused in the late 1940s, and having joined the fight to stop Soviet Communism on the Spanish front, they had no qualms about rallying to the same cause on a global front.

This is certainly indicated by some of the election material issued by nationalists during the election campaigns of the early Cold War period. Malachy Conlon, standing for the Parliament of Northern Ireland in South Armagh in 1945, warned voters ‘ever to the East is the sneering bulk of Communist Russia, where the Jews have marshalled mighty forces to carry on their age-old struggle—the destruction of Christianity’. Warming to this theme, he continued in his address to claim that already in Britain ‘the seed bed is ready for the vile henchmen of the Communist Jew. The crumbling edifice of Christianity which they have built out of the ruins of the so-called

reformation has been deserted for the crystal palaces of vice and pleasure'. Such was the strength of his feeling on the spread of Communism that Conlon, a staunch nationalist, claimed that the main question before voters was whether they wished their beloved Ireland to be:

> shackled forever to this seething cauldron of corruption which lies across the channel. To-day or to-morrow but certainly at no distant date that cauldron will boil over and Communism will ooze like a burst sewer pipe over the "Fortress of England".[44]

As early as 1945, before the USSR had been painted as the nefarious force in international affairs it was to become in the West, the Irish national question was being framed around the issue of Communism.

Like the Unionists, Conlon did not simply fear the extreme left. He also targeted Labour in his tirade against Nationalism's political opponents. Attacking the Labour candidate for South Armagh, he stated 'Mr Agnew is a Catholic and I believe a decent man, but as he answers to the Labour whip he is but a cog in the Labour machine. Can Mr Agnew deny the affection of his party for Moscow?' Putting this in context, Conlon claimed the Labour Party was 'infested' by Communists and a hot-bed of their activity. He also played on the atheistic aspects of the ideology and sold the election as a choice between an anti-Christian Soviet puppet or an Irish patriot pledged to defend the country against Communism. Concluding his speech, the Nationalist candidate asked: 'we are marshalled together and we are asked to march. There are two flags in the sand—the Hammer and Sickle of the Communist Jew—and the flag of our own land. Which flag will you support?'.[45]

Such a stand-point is interesting on a number of levels. Firstly, the Nationalists are established as vehemently anti-Communist. Even if the vociferous nature of the attack was not shared by others, the fact Conlon was permitted to stand as an official Nationalist candidate on this basis demonstrates there was at least no objection to his stance. Secondly, it is clear that the Nationalists were employing the same tactics as their Unionist opponents and Conservatives in Great Britain. Scare-mongering against the spread of evil Communism was used to rally supporters to the cause. In conjunction with this, Labour—a potential threat to both the traditional unionist and nationalist vote—was attacked and smeared by accusations of Communist infiltration and association.

In the wake of revelations about the Final Solution and Holocaust, when there was a prevalent sympathy for the Jewish people internationally, it is notable this sort of anti-Semitism remained in Catholic Nationalist circles. Such explicit sentiments are in striking contrast to those expressed in election material in Great Britain and the public pronouncements of unionists in the period, warranting consideration. Wood describes Conlon as a 'blood-and-soil cultural Fascist and anti-Semite who talked the language of blood sacrifice and visceral hatred of Britain'. Conlon was a founding member of the Anti-Partition League—established to bring all shades of nationalists in Northern Ireland together in a single, co-ordinating organisation. In spite of his anti-Semitism and the 'increasingly deranged analogies he drew between the position of Catholics in Northern Ireland and those of the Jews', he was neither reprimanded nor disowned by the League.[46]

Nationalism in late Nineteenth Century Europe centred on a collective memory and perceived common history, shared language, and a sense of shared civic sentiments. As attachment to these constructed connexions grew in strength in Europe after 1848, and all the more so after 1870, it follows that Catholics (forming a community which went beyond nations) would be affected by the developments.[47] Irish nationalism not only fits into this mould, but the sense of an exclusive Catholic identity (particularly following the rise of ultramontanism) certainly developed in Nineteenth Century Ireland. Boyer argues that this Catholic, identity based politics on a mass basis not only survived into the Twentieth Century, but provided a vital foundation for the construction of European politics following the upheavals of the Second World War.[48]

Anti-Semitism was a long established aspect of Catholic popular culture —it was often used to recover or defend age-old conceptions of cultures that viewed themselves as historically rooted. At a rally in Cork during the Spanish Civil War, 40,000 people heard Msgr Patrick Sexton, Dean of Cork, blame the conflict on 'a gang of murderous Jews in Moscow'.[49] In addition, anti-Semitism was frequently utilised in majority Catholic countries such as Austria and France at a local or regional level to electioneer around 'petit bourgeois' and agrarian issues.[50]

This is reflected in the Irish state's attitude towards Jews; de Valera's government remained silent on the Nuremburg Laws, the Justice

Department opposed Éire granting special refugee status to Jews fleeing Nazi Germany and Garda Special Branch kept Irish Jews under surveillance during the War. In contrast to the 10,000 Jewish children given homes in Britain, only 60 Jews were admitted into Éire by the end of the War. The Justice Department defended this by arguing, 'they do not assimilate with other people but remain a sort of colony of a world-wide Jewish community. This makes them a potential irritant in the body politic and has led to disastrous results from time to time in other countries'.[51] Jews did not fit into the ethno-religious identity of Ireland—they were perceived as a potential threat to it—and handled accordingly. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the *Irish News* coverage of Conlon's speech does not include any of the anti-Semitic remarks (*Irish News*, 11 June 1945).

This would certainly add context to Conlon's stance and utterances, as catholic anti-Communist language was alike across Europe.[52] Standing as a nationalist, in a rural seat with an overwhelming Catholic majority, his approach to electioneering clearly fits into the European model of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Given that unionism's political perspectives were effectively frozen in that era (much to the Conservatives' bemusement), it stands to reason that nationalism in Northern Ireland would be as well.

It is clear then that in the first decade of the Cold War, the new enemy—Communism—was blended in with the long perceived opponents of Catholic, nationalist Ireland. The stance taken by other Nationalist candidates emphasises this. In South Down, Gerald Annesley told voters that in the event of a Labour (or Socialist as he referred to it) victory, 'the aim of the majority of that government, as is frankly stated by leading politicians in Britain, will be to establish not merely a Welfare State but a State so close to Communism that everywhere in its policy you will see the shadow of the Kremlin'.[53] Annesley was campaigning against the Welfare State, the NHS and nationalisation. He advocated the unification of Ireland, giving rational sounding arguments about the financial and economic disadvantages to 'the six counties' in remaining part of the UK.

At the other end of Northern Ireland, the same mistrust was evident. The *Derry Weekly News & Tyrone Herald* expressed its misgivings about the new Labour government at Westminster: 'our concern is now with the new Democracy, the men who sang the "Red Flag" on their first day of

Parliamentary power, and one question must be answered…are they Communists?'

The editorial answers no, but is still contemptuous and suspicious of the new left-wing government. Equally disparaging about the ousted Conservatives, the opinion piece embodies the strong anti-British *and* anti-Communist sentiment being blended together by nationalists (*Derry Weekly News & Tyrone Herald*, 4 August 1945).

The anti-left theme was a feature throughout the 1945 election campaigns. Matt Cunningham, Chairman of Newry No.2 Rural District Council, presided over an election meeting at which he stated that 'Labour had no national policy, and therefore no right in a Nationalist constituency'.[54] Here again is evidence of that ingrained sense of Catholic identity. As Northern Ireland Labour (at this stage) had no declared position on the partition issue, it was felt they could not represent a largely Catholic electorate. This is another similarity with the unionists; the Commonwealth Labour Party was condemned vehemently for contesting the Unionist stronghold of Armagh Central in the election, and the candidate Thomas Martin accused of 'audacity' for daring to split the unionist vote (*Belfast Telegraph*, 5 June 1945). Similarly, a Mr McKeogh of Newry made reference during the meeting to the 'hypocritical championing of the ideals of James Connolly' by the Labour Party. Mr Charles O'Donnell then told those present he had been a member of the Labour Party but had resigned from it due to 'its partitionist attitude'.

Conlon and Annesley were by no means alone in taking a stand against Communism in 1945. At his selection meeting in St Mary's Hall, T.J. Campbell said:

> I believe in God—so I am not a Communist. I believe in the future life—so I am not a Communist. The Communist hates the excesses of capitalism—so do I. The Communist says red rule can cure these evils. It cannot… The red state is an absolute tyranny. Nothing can be said or done against it. Christianity is crushed out. Family life is made very hard, if not destroyed. (*Irish News*, 1 June 1945)

The language employed not only reflects the defence of religion concept inherent in nationalist rhetoric and is identical to that employed by the Catholic Church, but also mirrors that of the Unionists. Similarly, James Collins, the Federation of Labour[55] candidate for Falls condemned Socialism and talked of dictatorship, restrictions on religious and personal

freedoms and the creation of state serfs, but was ‘confident that the people of Falls would give those who would propose the setting up of a Socialistic state in Christian Ireland their answer in unmistakable fashion’ (*Irish News*, 8 June 1945). In line with Conlon’s sentiments and those expressed at the aforementioned meeting in Newry, Collins condemned his Socialist-Republican opponent, and appealed to voters as ‘people who honour Ireland’s dead and martyred not to stand for their names being dragged through the Red filth of Socialism’ (*Irish News*, 12 June 1945). Across Northern Ireland the message was clear: true patriots would vote for the nationalist candidate and anyone who backed Socialists—or even Socialist republicans—was a traitor to Ireland and the sacrifice of its heroes. As with the Unionists, nationalist candidates were appealing to the passions of voters to ensure supporters came out, and endeavouring to undermine the left with accusations of betrayal or perfunctory commitment to the greater cause.

Just as the actions of the Soviet Union in central and eastern Europe came to be appropriated by unionists for the local political narrative, nationalists did the same. Similar Nazi comparisons had been made just after the War; Cahir Healy told the annual meeting of Fermanagh County Council. ‘you read about French troops being ordered out of Syria in order that the Syrian people might have liberty to determine their own future, but while the British government are doing that in Syria, they are tolerating a Nazi system in this country’ (*Fermanagh Times*, 21 June 1945). Both now clamoured to compare the other and their methods with the nefarious activities of the USSR. A. Mulvey, referring to alleged voter intimidation by unionist gangs, told election meetings in Tyrone that ‘Sir Basil Brooke and his ministers characterised the entry of the 26 counties government into 6 county affairs as Communist, but the only outward sign of Communist methods in Ireland were those afforded in the shameful election scenes in Belfast, Antrim and Garvagh’ (*Irish News*, 7 February 1949). The Irish News suggested Stalin could learn some tactics from the Ulster Unionist headquarters, and wrote of ‘gerrymandering, victimisation and coercion, that puts Northern Ireland on a level with Russia’s satellites east of the Iron Curtain’ (*Irish News*, 9 February 1949). In language reminiscent of that employed by Conlon and Annesley at the previous election, at a rally for North Armagh anti-partitionist John McAlinden, it was said: ‘Ireland was one of the last strongholds of Christianity and Catholicity in the world’.

Therefore, a united Ireland was good for Europe and Christianity as a whole, allowing a solid front to be formed against the 'hordes of Communist Russia', a sentiment reflected at meetings in South Armagh (*Irish News*, 7 February 1949).

Just as unionists painted involvement from the Republic in Northern Ireland as Communistic, nationalists compared the border with the Iron Curtain and Unionist methods as Soviet-like. Future Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer told an election meeting in Derry: 'they knew full well that the results could be predicted with just the same certainty as could the result in an election east of the Iron Curtain' (*Irish News*, 7 February 1949). The *Irish News* editorialised:

> In this Country there is a boundary dividing it into two parts—free Ireland and occupied Ireland. In the cause of freedom men are trying to break down the Iron Curtain. In the same cause, Irishmen are trying to make the Border no more than just an evil memory. (*Irish News*, 3 February 1949)

Whereas there is a discernible increase in the intensity of unionist anti-Communism as the Cold War developed, this is less the case with nationalists. The fervent, passionate rejection and condemnation of the ideology and the centrality of religion, already well established, simply endured. The *Irish News* derided unionists for having apparently only recently discovered the threat posed by Communism to religion. It then went on to praise Franco, Salazar and other Catholic leaders for their long and unwavering stand against the Communist menace, and insisted that Catholics, unlike unionists, had been consistent in their opposition to its principles and resolute in the defence of Christianity (*Irish News*, 12 June 1945). That religion was central to the criticism, coupled with such public endorsement of Franco, at a time when his regime was treated with aloof disassociation due to its War-time closeness to the Axis powers, gives an indication of how intrinsic Catholicism was to Irish nationalism. It also demonstrates that nationalism conformed to Miliband and Liebman's concept of conservative anti-Communism just as much as unionism.

Standing again for South Down in 1951, Annesley criticised the incumbent Unionist MP Captain Orr for comparing republicanism with Communism, as he maintained a united Ireland would 'be the safest place from Communism in the world' (*Irish News*, 25 October 1951) and again warned a Labour victory would lead to a slide towards Communism (*Irish*

News, 15 October 1951). As more and more reports of brutality and subjection emerged from the Eastern Bloc, comparisons with the Irish situation continued. Alderman Frank McCarroll, speaking on behalf of the Anti-Partition League, stated 'British occupied Ireland shares with curtained countries [*presumably meaning those behind the Iron Curtain*] the dubious distinction of being able to forecast election results with precision' (*Derry Journal*, 17 October 1951). Comparisons with the Soviet regime did not end with assertions of vote-rigging. The Unionist government was—as in previous elections—accused of Soviet style propaganda: misleading the world about the reality of the situation with disinformation about the scale of unionist sentiment and how the Catholic minority were treated (*Derry Journal*, 24 October 1951). The *Irish News* asserted that the oppression and persecution suffered by Poland from the Soviet Union had long existed in Ireland at the hands of Great Britain (*Irish News*, 15 October 1953). This sort of analogy is very much in the spirit of Conlon's assertions about Catholics in Northern Ireland and Jews under the Nazis.

Nationalists were not only inherently conservative, but also employed anti-Communist rhetoric as an election tool. The anti-Catholic and anti-clerical nature of the ideology was employed to rally support to the party which sold itself as the defender of Catholic interests. As with the Ulster Unionists, the international situation had been appropriated and woven into the traditional local political narrative. Whereas for unionists, remaining part of the United Kingdom was the surest means by which the people of Northern Ireland could play their part in the fight against Communism, the opposite was the case for nationalists. Only by complete detachment from Great Britain could Catholic Ireland ensure it would be safe from malign Soviet influence, as Britain was poised (or the process was underway with the Welfare State) to succumb to Communism. Both unionists and nationalists played on the widespread fear of Communism that existed in the period and used it to buttress their long-established arguments over the right constitutional settlement for Northern Ireland. The manner in which both nationalists and unionists emphasised the atheistic nature of Communism as an attack further drew both religion—and the churches themselves—into politics to a level beyond the existing ethno-religious nature of Northern Irish politics.

The nature of Northern Irish politics in this regard fits into the European milieu. Analogous but separate societies of Socialists, Catholics, Liberals

and Protestants developed in certain regions across the continent, each developing their own social, economic and cultural organisations. Political parties were extensions of this into the political sphere, rather than independent entities.[56] In Northern Ireland, the Ulster Unionist Council was an umbrella bringing together the different facets of Protestant society. Party structures for the Nationalists were even looser, with no central direction and candidates selected by self-appointed committees of local Catholic notables. Conway argues that Catholic political parties possessed a 'fortress mentality' stemming from a sense of distinctness and creating an unbridgeable divide between Catholics and non-Catholics. As a result, the aim in election campaigns was not to appeal broadly so as to achieve a large vote, but to rally as much of the Catholic community as possible.[57] This is evident in the nature of Conlon's speech and the attitude of other Nationalists described above. Labour were not Catholic and therefore had no right to represent Catholic, nationalist electors. Communism was not only an anathema, but a serious threat to every aspect of Irish Catholic culture and identity, and therefore should not only be resisted, but must be to safeguard everything a good nationalist held dear.

The problem for labour

It is clear that both the Ulster Unionists and Nationalists were inherently conservative and conformed to 'conservative anti-Communism'. Miliband and Liebman also identify a trend towards anti-Communism amongst social democrats and the moderate left, which from 1945 helped validate the Cold War and martial labour movements to the cause of anti-Communism. In addition, social democratic anti-Communism became a tool utilised within parties and trade unions to remove or target genuinely Communist or simply hard left opponents.[58]

This form of anti-Communism was evident in the British Labour Party from the very beginning of the Cold War and before. In 1942 the Communist Party of Great Britain had requested affiliation with the Labour movement, which the moderate leadership of Labour blocked. Nonetheless, there was a sizeable body of support for affiliation, and by 1945 the CPGB had managed to win over the leaderships of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) and the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), amongst others. Regardless, Labour's National

Executive Committee (NEC) remained determined to exclude the Communists.[59] The persistence of the CPGB and the sympathy they enjoyed from the hard left of Labour proved problematic for a Labour leadership and government forced to adopt increasingly anti-Soviet policies and contend with growing anti-Communist sentiment domestically.[60]

The Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) had similar problems. As has been demonstrated, the NILP had to contend with operating within a fundamentally right-wing political spectrum and the inherent suspicion of Socialism. NILP Leader Harry Midgley lost his Catholic support base (and in 1938 his seat in the Parliament of Northern Ireland) when he publically sided with the Spanish Republicans. At a public meeting he was addressing, Midgely was drowned out by a band playing 'Franco's Here' and the crowd shouting 'we want Franco!'.[61] In the post war years, Labour was obliged to try and straddle both communities in a divided society, all the while dealing with the taint of Communist association. The Communists in Northern Ireland pursued the same approach as their counterparts in Great Britain. They argued they should be allowed to affiliate with the Labour movement in Northern Ireland so that post-war social reform could be pushed through more effectively. While there was a degree of support for these arguments within the NILP, the majority of the party was suspicious of Communist intentions and concerned about how damaging it could be publicly.[62] In its efforts against Communist affiliation, the NILP leadership faced trouble from the same trade unions as the British NEC.[63]

During the 1945 Stormont election, James Kennedy, the Commonwealth Labour candidate for Windsor had to defend his party from accusations of being Communist after Brooke described Commonwealth Labour as the 'thin edge of the Communistic wedge' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 9 June 1945). In turn, Harry Midgley—now leader of Commonwealth Labour—told an election rally that his former party, the NILP 'had spurned and rejected the Communist Party application for affiliation, but they were working hand and glove—like twin affinities in South Belfast' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 28 July 1945). That not only nationalists and unionists were accusing each other of behaving like the Soviet Union and charging the NILP and other leftist parties with being Communist, but that the left itself was doing so, indicates the extent to which anti-Communism imbued political consciousness in Northern Ireland in the post-War years.

As the Cold War developed, NILP hostility towards the Communist Party intensified. Labour was frequently eager to distance itself from the continuous efforts of the nationalists and unionists to taint it by however tenuous association. The North Down Labour candidate A.H. McElroy told a meeting that the alternative to nationalisation and colonial development was Communism (*Irish News* 21 February 1950). In his election material for a 1952 by-election, Party Secretary Sam Napier not only attacked the Ulster Unionists, but also Communism. He told voters of his belief that 'nationally and internationally, Conservatism—or Unionism—leads to poverty, and poverty breeds Communism'.[64] These two messages were emphasised in a Labour publication that year. *Help to change the face of Ulster* committed the NILP to maintaining the union and argued 'the best defence against rebellion—or, for that matter, against Communism—lies in good government'.[65] The implication being good government was synonymous with Labour government.

It is clear then that the NILP faced the same Communist-related issues as Labour in Great Britain. Tainted by Communist association, the leaderships of both Labour parties were suspicious of, and determined to prevent, Communist Party affiliation—in spite of considerable support from their hard-left wings. Equally, both endeavoured to distance themselves from the Communist parties and counter accusations from political rivals by taking a firm stand against Communist infiltration. As anti-Communism took root amongst the population, both parties responded by taking up the fight against insidious Communism—the NILP arguing that only Labour and its encompassing social policies could prevent Marxist mantras from appealing to the most deprived. By joining the crusade of more right-wing elements against Soviet-backed Communism, Labour (both in Great Britain and Northern Ireland) legitimised the red scare and contributed to the Cold War mentality that was permeating politics and society across the United Kingdom in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Northern Irish Mccarthyism?

The years 1950–1954 mark the apogee of anti-Communism.[66] The Korean War had pitted the newly formed Eastern and Western Blocs against one another, but resulted in stalemate. This left the home front the main outlet for anti-Communist feeling, which Deery argues stemmed from reasoned

evaluation of developments on the world stage and suspicions of espionage internally.[67] These anxieties and frustrations were ripe for exploitation, and found their champion in the United States in the form of Senator Joe McCarthy.[68] McCarthy played on the fears of Soviet Communism which had fomented amongst the American public and whipped them into a frenzy, placing himself at the head of the campaign to root out Communists and Soviet spies allegedly lurking in every aspect of American society.

This frenzy, McCarthy's loyalty investigations and the House of Representatives' 'Un-American Activities' Committee, contributed to 'rolling back' Communist power becoming a major plank of the Eisenhower Administration's foreign policy. Taken alongside the blacklisting of Hollywood screenwriters and others in the film industry as well as the purging of libraries of 'anti-American' literature, the combination produced a considerable degree of trepidation amongst America's allies—particularly in Europe.[69]

McCarthyism, as it came to be known after its principle proponent, made many in Britain uncomfortable. It far too closely resembled authoritarianism, with its demagoguery, purges, discrediting of intellectuals, informers and even in some cases book-burning; thereby undermining the United States' apparent leadership of the free world.[70] These occurrences on the other side of the Atlantic were deemed to be decidedly 'un-British' by government, Parliament and people; inconsistent with the tolerant and more sedate approach to politics in Britain. This meant that even though the same period witnessed the highpoint of anti-Communism in the UK, repulsion at American excesses meant that McCarthyism became an anathema and something to be avoided.[71]

Caute argues that in the melting pot that is the United States, one of the appeals of McCarthyism was that it was effectively a bandwagon on which any American could jump in order to prove they were a good American—all it took was an open hatred of Communism.[72] It has been demonstrated that anti-Communism was an important element helping to maintain the Conservative–Unionist relationship. The anti-Soviet Communist narrative was also a rallying call to unite the loose confederations which constituted the Ulster Unionist and Nationalist parties. In this respect, certain elements of McCarthyism were arguably manifested in Northern Ireland in the early 1950s.

While there were no purges, book burnings or black-listings, anti-Communism in Northern Ireland does correlate with many of the themes inherent in McCarthyism. Returning to Miliband and Liebman's discussion of anti-Communism, they argue that:

> Even though 'Communism' has usually been totally irrelevant to the issues in contention, with Communists very often, as in the United States, virtually or totally absent from the scene. Once 'Communism' could be turned into the issue, however implausibly, argument could be laid aside and invective and denunciation could take over, and be directed against anyone who did not wholly subscribe to the basic tenets of anticommunism.[73]

This could certainly be taken as a description of anti-Communism in Northern Ireland. Firstly, the primary political issue in contention was the constitutional status of the country. In spite of the intangible arguments that the Union or Irish unification was the best means to fight or avoid Communism, Northern Ireland's sovereignty was not directly related to the perceived threat of Soviet Communism in the period. Secondly, although Northern Irish Communists claimed to have 35 groups and branches across the country and to have seen an 800 per cent increase in membership from the mid-1930s into the late 1940s, they were politically marginal.[74] The RUC did keep known Communists under surveillance, but they did not pose a threat to the security of the state. In fact, the RUC reported the Communist Party was finding great difficulty in raising sufficient funds to re-publish its newspaper *Unity* in 1948.[75] Indeed, in the 1945 Northern Irish parliament election, they garnered only 3.5 per cent of the vote, which slipped to an almost invisible 0.2 per cent in the 1949 election.[76] Thirdly, in spite of this, 'invective and denunciation' did take over. Unionists and Nationalists alike condemned Soviet Communism and tainted the NILP by associating them with it. What's more, election addresses such as Conlon's can only be described as invective—particularly as it ties in traditional ethereal enemies with this new one.

Across Ireland, the anti-Communist rhetoric bred fear and suspicion just as it did in the United States. By no means alone, Miss P. McClean wrote to the Ministry of Home Affairs in September 1948 to report that she had received from New York—unsolicited—a package of comic papers with propaganda pasted into them, and a copy of the Communist Manifesto. She reasoned that as she was the leader of a local youth organisation, this must be an attempt to propagate Communism in the young. The Ministry took the

matter seriously, asked her to forward the package and reported the matter to the RUC.[77] With the rise of McCarthyism, these sorts of suspicions grew to ludicrous proportions. In April 1952, the *Roscommon Herald* suggested that the Irish Housewives' Association (IHA)—founded as a pressure group to represent married Irish women—had 'always been used as a medium of expression by Marxists and Communists'. The resulting disruption forced the organisation to refuse the admission of any new members. Although the paper subsequently printed an apology, the distrust created never dissipated, and fear lingered that the IHA was a front for red political agitation.[78]

Caute describes McCarthyism as 'crude, below-the-belt, eye-gouging, bare-knuckled partisan exploitation of anti-Communism, usually on the basis of half-truths, warmed over "revelations", and plain lies'.[79] A suitably brusque characterisation of the dogma, and one that can be applied certainly to both the Nationalist and Unionist public statements on Communism in the period. Haynes suggests that McCarthy utilised anti-Communism as a partisan weapon and had no qualms about making reckless accusations to fulfil his political purposes.[80] Similarly, both nationalists and unionists played on the widespread fears of Communist machinations that existed at the time to further bolster their established narratives and also undermine their shared enemy in the NILP.

This was not merely confined to fearmongering at home. On a goodwill publicity visit to the United States in 1950, Sir Basil Brooke played on American suspicions of the Soviet threat in a speech at the News Club in New York. He discussed Northern Ireland, the Commonwealth and their importance alongside the US as the main opponents to Communism.[81] Throughout his public statements in America, together with countering Irish-American propaganda and reiterating Northern Ireland's constitutional position, his stance was 'that we were a part of something very much bigger, not only important to the Commonwealth, but also important to America itself, in the fight against Communism'.[82] In a palpable example of 'partisan exploitation' the Ulster Unionist leader attempted to counter deep-rooted support for Irish nationalism in the United States by playing on American paranoia surrounding Communism. Brooke hoped to garner sympathy for unionism by framing the questions over the sovereignty of Northern Ireland in the broader international confrontation which was becoming the focus of policy in the United States. Brooke served as a

reminder of Northern Ireland's strategic value in the defence of the North Atlantic (highlighted during the Second World War) and the steadfast support of the Northern Irish government in contrast to the neutrality of its counterpart in Dublin. Ulster Unionists hoped to take advantage of American preoccupation with Communism by reiterating that Northern Ireland and the United States shared common values which were threatened by Soviet advance and proclaiming their anti-Communist credentials in the emerging struggle for supremacy. Just as proponents of McCarthyism played on the rabble-rousing potential of the Red Scare for partisan purposes, Northern Irish leaders were not above exploiting the zeitgeist for their own narrow political motives.

Despite its appearance and those aspects which were so unpalatable in Britain, Landis presents arguments that McCarthyism did not emerge out of radical populism. It can be explained as an expedient to harness popular sentiment in order to undermine and break the New Deal consensus which had dominated American politics over the preceding two decades.[83] McCarthyism was therefore a product of 'elite political conflict', the anomaly being that the nature of party clashes in the United States had not traditionally seen the opposition being tarred as 'traitors'.[84] This could equally be applied to Northern Ireland, given the targeted nature of anti-Communism there. Furthermore, the anomaly does not apply; such vehemence between nationalists and unionists was long established and accusations of treachery normal in political discourse. Therefore, if the superficial aspects of McCarthyism are stripped away—demagoguery and mass hysteria—then the partisan political motivations for employing anti-Communism bear striking similarities with its use in Northern Ireland.

The churches in Northern Ireland

The Cold War possessed an unambiguous religious element. For many living through it, the conflict was a confrontation between the God-fearing and the godless. Consequently, religion, and primarily from a Western perspective, Christianity became an important element in the global struggle. For Britain and the United States, religion served not only as a means by which to rally support in the fight against atheistic Communism, but also served as a propaganda tool underscoring the freedoms and moral superiority of the West over the authoritarian and profane East.[85] Dianne

Kirby argues that religion and the Cold War therefore needs further examination as its place within the historiography has tended to be noticeably overlooked.[86] It has already been demonstrated that unionist and nationalist politicians played on the anti-theistic nature of Communism. Given the sectarian component to the ethno-political divide in Northern Ireland, it is therefore important to consider anti-Communism from the perspective of the Christian denominations there, which will simultaneously contribute towards filling the historiographical gap in the broader Cold War narrative identified by Kirby.

There was a climate of apprehension within the British Churches over the worsening international situation by 1949.[87] Given the atmosphere, in 1949 the Church of Scotland considered the implications of the rise of Communism. Between 1949 and 1954 a Special Commission on Communism published a number of reports dealing with the Church's teaching and the ideology. An essential link between Communism and secularisation was drawn, which the Church of Scotland saw as deplorable. The Commission categorised Communism as acting as a substitute religion, 'functioning as an insidious moral malaise, as much as an aggressive geopolitical threat'.[88]

Similarly, in 1949 the National and International Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) conducted a detailed analysis and discussion of Communism as practiced in the Soviet Union. While it only took one year to address the issue in contrast to the Scottish Church's five, it nonetheless concluded that there were evils to the Communist system and that it was irreconcilable with Presbyterianism. However, the Irish Committee's report identified three problems with Communism distinct from the two recognised by the Scottish Commission. Firstly, there was the issue of dictatorship; whereas western democracy placed the emphasis on individual freedom and liberty. Secondly, the Church took issue with world revolution. A necessary evil for Communists, Presbyterians were uncomfortable with the idea that 'every individual who differs or opposes be obliterated'. Finally, there was intolerant persecution. Communists 'hate the word "religion", and may seek in the end to destroy and root out of life what appears to them only a reactionary superstition'. According to the report, Christianity 'exalts the individual soul as a thing of ultimate worth, as being a child of God and of eternity', whereas Communism treated man

as purely material and 'with no immortality or permanence, the individual has no such final significance and therefore commands less reverence'.[89]

The threat of Communism was clearly an issue of great concern, the subject coming up year on year in meetings of the PCI General Assembly throughout the early 1950s. By 1953—at the high point of the Red Scare—the Presbyterian Church was asserting 'it is one of today's commonplaces that Communism is now Christianity's greatest rival'.[90] The recommendation was that the best means of fighting Communism was to offer itself as an alternative in addressing oppression and social problems. The PCI advocated an active and vigorous effort on the part of Christians in both secular and religious life to demonstrate that it offered more to the individual than the platitudes of Communism.[91]

While it is unsurprising the Scottish and Irish Churches would see Communist ideas as conflicting with Presbyterianism, both churches did so for different reasons. The former opposed the ideology on the basis of its enforced secularism, arguing the ideology became a substitute religion. The latter objected as Soviet Communism intrinsically involved dictatorship, world revolution and intolerant persecution. The focus of both churches is interesting. The Scots were primarily concerned with religiosity, while the Irish emphasised individual rights and liberties. This naturally covered faith-related issues, but also covered society more generally. It is also noteworthy that the language and attitude of the PCI is very similar to that of the Ulster Unionist politicians in their election addresses. This conformity, considered alongside that of the nationalists and Catholic Church embodied in Conlon, highlights how interlinked politics and religion were in Northern Ireland.

The Scottish and Irish Presbyterians broadly adopted the same approach to Communism, if not always sharing the same stance, but the same cannot be said of Irish and British Methodists. The former did not overly concern themselves with international matters and were largely content to follow the lead of their counterparts in Great Britain. Communism was nonetheless a concern for British Methodists. It was perceived as a sufficient challenge to their Christian faith and ethics that a committee was tasked with attempting to counter it. As with the Presbyterians, by 1949 the Methodists had begun to see Communism as a threat. The Methodist Annual Conference called upon Britain to provide leadership to Western Europe and maintain the

Commonwealth ‘as an instrument of the freedom and peace of nations’.[92] The Methodist Church’s position was quite clear: Communism was becoming a threat and the world was dividing into two ideological camps which was a lamentable state of affairs.

Both the formal governing bodies of the Anglicans and affiliated opinion forming publications took more interest in Cold War affairs than either the Presbyterians or the Methodists. Indeed, the Archbishop of York frequently embodied the archetypal cold war warrior.[93] Nonetheless, even when Anglican priests with left-wing leanings are excluded, a large proportion of clergy in England remained reluctant to adopt an explicit anti-Communism.[94] This mentality was reflected in the Irish clergy and there was no figure comparable with the Archbishop of York in the Church of Ireland. Furthermore, unconstrained by ties to the state, and influenced by the English Church only when it suited them, the Church of Ireland could be, as it saw fit, more or less confrontational in stance.

While the General Synod was not distracted by the spread of Communism, the *Church of Ireland Gazette* did give it a degree of consideration. In August 1953 a series of articles discussing the ideology and putting it in wider historical perspective were published. It was argued that ‘in the Middle Ages, to hold out for principle against Church authority brought much the same consequences as independence of thought leads to in Eastern Europe to-day’.[95] Comparison was drawn between defending religion under Communism and martyrdom against the repression of the Church in the Middle Ages. The implication therefore was that Communism should be resisted and that it was tyrannical and oppressive.

The Catholic Church viewed Communism as more of a threat than the other churches and was stridently more vocal in expressing its opposition. Its top-down, autocratic structures allowed this in a way unthinkable in the democratically composed Protestant churches. The attitude of the Irish Catholic Church is easier to discern than the other churches in Ireland—ultramontanism ensuring uniformity with Rome. Consequently, the question is not so much how did the Irish Church respond, but what did it say and do in the fight against Soviet-backed Communism?

In 1937 Pius XI had written on the subject of Communism. As a Papal Encyclical, it was disseminated throughout all Catholic primacies, archdioceses and dioceses—including of course Armagh which covers

Northern Ireland. It described as an imminent danger 'Bolshevistic and Atheistic Communism, which aims at upsetting the social order and at undermining the very foundations of Christian civilisation'. In his Encyclical *Quo apostolici muneris* Leo XIII had defined Communism as 'the fatal plague which insinuates itself into the very marrow of human society only to bring about its ruin'. Communism, he argued, robbed man of liberty, human dignity and removed all the moral restraints to blind impulse.[96] As with the PCI, Catholicism attacked Communism not only on the basis of its atheism, but because of its implications on the rights and dignity of the individual. The spread of Communist ideas was described as an unprecedentedly diabolical propaganda,[97] leading the Pope to 'place the vast campaign of the Church against world Communism under the standard of St Joseph, her mighty Protector'.[98] Pius XI effectively declared a Catholic campaign against Communism, leaving the position of the church on it quite clear. This is perhaps the sort of early lead in anti-Communism the *Irish News* was referring to in its editorial criticising the Unionists on 12 June 1945.

Pius XII's Encyclical, *Response ad dubia de communism*, issued in 1949, attacked Stalin's totalitarianism and prescribed excommunication for anyone who voted for, joined, collaborated with or even read the newspapers of Communists. As well as being a high point in the Cold War, the following year had also been declared a Holy Year by the Pope and there was a sense amongst Catholics that they were now on the frontline in the struggle with Communism. This was re-enforced by the fact that even Cardinals were in prison in Eastern Europe. Northern Ireland was not immune from this worldwide fervour; Northern Irish Catholics had an acute awareness of the threat posed by Communism. In the 1950s, allegedly every Catholic schoolchild was familiar with the plight of the imprisoned Hungarian Primate Cardinal Mindszenty.[99]

Consequently Northern Ireland was awash with Church sanctioned publications outlining the threat of Communism and virtue of Catholicism. Catholics were unabashed in their denunciation of Communism compared to the Presbyterians or Anglicans. One publication from 1950, *Communism and the home*, explained that the Church's opposition was not political, but because the ideology was 'atheistic, immoral and degrading to man'. As with the PCI, the loss of individuality was highlighted, with an assertion that in a Communist society, no one owned themselves, rather they

belonged to the state. The pamphlet argued that 'society' replaced God under atheistic Communism and what was moral and constituted an individual's rights was defined purely by the state. It held eastern Europe up as an example of what life was like without any rights, describing 'the millions of people in the forced-labour camps, the hundreds of thousands in the jails, the thousands of people who have fled to other lands… it is the meaning of the imprisonment of Archbishop Stephinac and Cardinal Mindszenty'.[100] It concluded with the propagandistic assurance that:

> The practice of Communism is demonstrating just how right has been the Church all along and how her ideas, which are the exact opposite of those of the Marxists, have been the ones which alone are in keeping with the dignity of man.[101]

While such pamphlets were not official church publications, they were nonetheless printed by Church-recognised Catholic organisations, so it can be concluded that the Church hierarchy did not, at least, object to the message.

Certainly the public utterances from the Irish Church hierarchy in no way contradict the message and sentiment of these pamphlets. Cardinal D'Alton, Archbishop of Armagh from 1946 to 1963, was distinctly vocal in his condemnation of Communism. In his 1946 Christmas homily D'Alton warned of 'bitter and relentless persecution' for the church in countries that subsequently fell under Russian influence.[102]

In 1950 the Bishop of Derry, Dr Neil Farren, addressed the issue of Communist agents in Ireland as part of his Lenten pastoral letter. Exemplifying the sentiments of the day, he warned, 'the devil and his agents are active even here in Ireland. Under modern conditions we cannot hope to escape entirely from the pagan influences which are abroad in the world to-day'. Once again, the inherently evil nature of Communism was emphasised, in language similar (though lacking the political character) of Conlon. The Bishop warned: 'you can take it for granted that the agents of Communism are active in our country' and reminded the faithful of the diocese that, 'when a man joins the Communist Party he thereby becomes an apostate from the Catholic Church and is excommunicated. Likewise anyone who buys, keeps or reads the official Communist paper is also excommunicated'. Dr Farren concluded by calling on Catholics to pray for

those ‘subjected to a vile persecution and diabolical efforts are being made to snatch from them and their children the divine gift of faith’.[103]

With sentiments similar to those to be expressed in the *Church of Ireland Gazette* about Medieval martyrdom, referring to the Battle of Lepanto, Bishop O’Doherty of Dromore told a congregation, ‘today we see on the Continent conditions that bear a marked resemblance to the conditions that existed at that time. There is an infidel invasion of nearly every country in Europe…that invasion may be resisted and repelled by a superior culture and inferior [*sic*.] philosophy of life only to be found in the Catholic Church. That is why this new heresy of Communism is so insistent in trying to overcome the Catholic Church’. He called upon the faithful to say the Rosary as it would take God, not just the free world, to defeat Russia (*Newry Reporter*, 8 October 1953). A week later, Fr J.P. Burke told a confraternity meeting in Newry Cathedral that Mary had promised at Fatima that if Catholics throughout the world recited the Rosary frequently enough, Russia would be converted. Warning those gathered about a lecture taking place as he spoke, he pointed out, ‘the devotion was not yet sufficiently well practiced when that night they had a Communist lecturing even in their own town’. As the threat was obviously growing ever closer, he exhorted trade unionists in the confraternity to ensure their unions were led by men of ‘proper disposition’ (*Newry Reporter*, 15 October 1953).

The language used could not be more strident, with Communism referred to as immoral, degrading, iniquitous, vile, and compared with the Devil himself. This sort of sentiment raises questions around a possible McCarthyite mentality within the Church. Certainly the literature circulated in Ireland and the threat of excommunication for simply buying the *Daily Worker* smack of the worst aspects of McCarthyism as practiced in the United States. As with the PCI, resistance to the spread of the ideology and a strident belief that Christianity was the infinitely better alternative was taught.

Given that there was no Catholic consensus on McCarthy, there was therefore no overt sanction or censure.[104] Irish Presbyterians on the other hand, could be unequivocal. In 1953 certain presbyteries prioritised the perceived threat of Catholicism in Ireland over that of Communism. It was asserted that ‘we could, in Roman Catholic Ireland, find ourselves maggotted by McCarthyism which is a kindred poison to Fascism, Nazism and Communism’.[105] In keeping with the British popular sentiment for

toleration and condescension towards American-style paranoia, Presbyterians appear to have objected to the sort of witch-hunt methods and mentality pursued in the United States against Communism. The concept of toleration implicit in this is, however, somewhat undermined by the prejudiced stance on Catholicism. Nonetheless, this can be interpreted as a rejection of the excesses of McCarthyism and demonstrates once again how the wider Cold War situation was woven into the local ethno-political narrative. McCarthyism was identified as abhorrent; it embodied the worst excesses generations of Protestants had feared would result from finding themselves in a Catholic-dominated, independent united Ireland, and so it was appropriated to serve as a warning of the importance of maintaining the Union so as to ensure 'Protestant liberty'.

Conclusion

By the mid-1950s, the wave of concentrated anti-Communism had begun to subside. With the death of Stalin; armistice, if not peace, in Korea; the fall of Senator McCarthy at the end of 1954; and the emergence of other more tangible Cold War issues alongside efforts at rapprochement from Khrushchev, fears of Communism waned—but by no means vanished. Yet, from its beginnings in 1945 until its heyday in the early 1950s, popular anti-Communism had gripped societies across the Western World.

The British government adopted an anti-Communist stance in the late 1940s, which Deery argues was a reasoned position to take given the legitimate threat posed by Communist agents in the period. Regardless, widespread popular anti-Communism developed—though the authoritarian, almost manic nature of anti-Communism in the United States; with its blacklists, denunciations and book burnings, was deemed wholly 'un-British' and disavowed. Therefore, while the highpoints of anti-Communist sentiment in Britain and the United States overlapped, from the British perspective, the 'McCarthyism' of the Americans became a mark of what not to do.

In terms of Northern Ireland, the UK's place apart (being detached from Great Britain both geographically and in terms of its anachronistic politics), anti-Communism was undoubtedly as much of a political issue as it was in Great Britain. Popular concerns over the malign influence and spread of Soviet-backed Communism not only existed, but were utilised by both the

Unionists and Nationalists to rally electoral support. In addition, anti-Communism was a convenient means by which to attack their shared enemy: Labour. In this sense, Northern Ireland fits comfortably into the British model. The fundamentally conservative Unionists and equally so Nationalists presented themselves as offering the only defence against Communism—as the Conservatives did in Great Britain. Both British Labour and the NILP (alongside its offshoots) faced accusations of Communist associations, which were compounded by the hard-left wings of both parties supporting efforts towards Communist affiliation. This pushed the centrist leaderships of both parties to adopt stringent anti-Communist stances in order to prove their anti-Communist credentials and ensure the trust of the electorate. As the Cold War intensified from the 1940s into the early 1950s, nationalists and unionists redoubled the comparisons between their political enemies and Soviet actions in Eastern Europe.

While Northern Irish anti-Communism sits comfortably in the mould of that in Great Britain, the nature of the societal divide does distinguish it. The ethno-political, identity based politics places Northern Ireland within the wider European context, where politics was an extension of exclusive communal societies and where elections were not about garnering broad support, but rallying the faithful to come out in force. This helps to explain how anti-Communism became so intricately woven into the local political narrative and was expressed with such vitriol, in spite of the limited threat posed to society or the constitutional arrangements by Soviet agents or Northern Irish Communists. The chauvinism of the Irish state and the anti-Semitism discernible in aspects of nationalist rhetoric reinforces this: Jews had long been perceived as alien and a threat to Catholic identity; Soviet Communism, the new menace to Catholic republican Ireland, was grafted on to the existing enemies. On the same basis, unionists identified Communists as a fifth column aided by an external power—thereby making them as potentially as destabilising as Irish republicans. The contemporaneous international situation made the danger seem all the more plausible to both nationalists and unionists.

The nature of anti-Communism in Northern Ireland invites comparison with ‘McCarthyism’. While the Unionist government at Stormont did keep known Communists under surveillance, it did not take anti-Communism as seriously as Westminster; instead utilising it politically. If McCarthyism is stripped of its superficial elements: blacklisting, denunciations, book-

burning, etc., and is viewed as employing anti-Communism for a purpose, rather than just in opposition to the ideology for its own sake, then elements of it are certainly apparent in Northern Ireland. Senator McCarthy and his proponents utilised anti-Communism as a means to attack the Democrats and the political consensus they had established, as well as the aspects of society they found objectionable. In Northern Ireland, the Communist threat was appropriated as a means of whipping up support for either the unionist or the Irish nationalist cause—and as a means of undermining the other.

Given the extent to which political action was an extension of society in Northern Ireland and the central place of religion in that society and its divisions, the attitudes of the Christian denominations add an important element to our understanding. The Methodists and Anglicans shared the aversion to Communism of their counterparts in Great Britain, but were not overtly explicit in opposing it. Perhaps reflecting the fact that unlike the Church of England, the Church of Ireland was not an arm of the state, there were no Cold War warriors to be found amongst its hierarchy. The Presbyterian Church, like its counterpart in Scotland, found Communism incompatible with Presbyterian teaching and sought to counter the spread of the ideology. However, they did so for somewhat different reasons: the Scottish Church on the basis of Communism's anti-theism, the Irish Presbyterians because of its assault on the rights and freedoms of the individual—and using language similar to that employed by Unionist politicians in their attacks on Soviet Communism. In addition, the marginally different attitudes may stem from the manner in which culture, society and politics were intertwined in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the arguments that Northern Irish Presbyterians used to reject Communism reflect the unionist opposition to Irish nationalism: arguments that the Catholicism it was synonymous with was authoritarian and an infringement of the rights and liberties perceived as inherent in Protestantism.

Catholic anti-Communism on the other hand was united and pre-dated the emergence of the Cold War. On the rise since the Bolshevik Revolution, it found an outlet during the Spanish Civil War, and it is therefore unsurprising that the Irish Catholic Church was amongst the most vociferous in opposing Soviet-backed Communism as the USSR emerged as a major power in the post-war years.

Northern Ireland therefore provides an interesting case study of the extent to which the Cold War permeated all aspects and levels of Western

society. It reveals how deeply the international situation impinged upon not just national, but local political considerations. In addition, the Northern Irish example provides insight into how the prevalent anti-Communism in Western Europe became woven into the communal narratives of a divided society. It contributes to filling the gap in the examination of religion in the conflict, by highlighting the extent to which it was a factor in shaping popular responses. As well as adding to the historiography of Britain and the Cold War generally, it provides a context by which British Cold War experience and responses can be assessed. Northern Irish anti-Communism fits into the European socio-political model and shares elements of that practiced in America, suggesting that the response in Great Britain could be considered the exception in the broad context. The nature of its politics distinguishing it somewhat from European patterns, and a conscious effort to avoid the frenzied, irascible anti-Communism of Anglo-Saxon America, sets the British response apart. Northern Ireland therefore offers a gauge to better understand the nature of anti-Communism in the first decade of the Cold War.

Notes

1. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 3.
2. Goodman, "British Government," 63.
3. Klehr et al., *The Secret World*, 15.
4. Miliband and Liebman, "Reflections On Anti-Communism," 10.
5. Deery, "The Secret Battalion," 9.
6. Morgan, *Labour in Power*, 436–437.
7. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 9.
8. Deery, "The Secret Battalion," 16.
9. Morgan, *Labour in Power*, 437.
10. Hennessy, *The Secret State*, 82–83.
11. Papers RE: prosecution of Val Morgan (PRONI, Home Affairs, HA/32/1/565).
12. Reports of Communist meetings 25/5/1940 to 6/11/41 (PRONI, Home Affairs, HA/32/1/557).
13. MI5 File on Betty Sinclair (National Archives, Security Service, KV 2/2506)
14. MI5 File on Desmond Greaves (National Archives, Security Service, KV 2/3363).
15. Harbinson, *The Ulster Unionist Party*, 104.
16. Cunningham, "An Historical Coda," 136.
17. Speech by Sir Basil Brooke, 2 July 1945 (P.R.O.N.I., Dept. of the Prime Minister, PM4/20/8) and Election Communication from Lt-Col J.M. Blackiston-Houston and Sir Walter Smiles, for the Westminster Parliamentary Election, Down 1945 (P.R.O.N.I., Ulster Unionist Council Papers, D1327/16/2/21).
18. Summary report of a visit to Northern Ireland by Chapman-Walker (Chief Political Officer) and J.P.L. Thomas MP, 20 February 1951 (Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive,

CCO 2/2/21).
19. Smith, “Ever Reliable Friends?” 83.
20. Memorandum by the Prime Minister, 7 November 1947 (PRONI, CAB/4/735).
21. Bew et al., *Northern Ireland*, 88.
22. Ibid., 93.
23. Prime Minister’s Message of thanks to loyalist’, 10 July 1945 (P.R.O.N.I., Dept. of the Prime Minister, PM/4/20/8).
24. Ulster Prime Minister on election results (P.R.O.N.I., Dept. of the Prime Minister, PM/4/20/8).
25. Derrick Amory standing in Tiverton wrote that Communism was the only danger to peace and that it was ‘out to destroy Christianity and all it stands for’. As with the following Welsh and Scottish examples, this is just a further example of many such specimens. Tiverton and Totnes are just two examples of the language employed by Conservatives across England (Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive, PUB 229/10/8).
26. Election communication from Norman Cole, Conservative and Liberal candidate for South Bedfordshire, 1951 (Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive, PUB 229/10/8).
27. Election communication from Jim Bowen Conservative candidate for Ebbw Vale, 1951 (Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive, PUB 229/10/13).
28. Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive, PUB 229/10/8 and PUB 229/10/13.
29. Miliband and Liebman, “Reflections On Anti-Communism,” 17.
30. Election communication from Montgomery Hyde, Ulster Unionist candidate North Belfast, 1951(Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive, PUB 229/10/15).
31. Election communication from L.P.S. Orr, Ulster Unionist candidate for South Down, 1951 (Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive, PUB 229/10/15)
32. Election speech by Brooke at Newcastle 17 October 1951 (P.R.O.N.I., Dept. of the Prime Minister, PM/4/20/14).
33. Raymond Mawby, Conservative MP for Totnes, 1955–1983 and assistant Postmaster General, 1963–1964, was paid for supplying Czechoslovakian military intelligence with information on Parliament and leading Conservatives on a regular basis. ‘Tory MP sold information to Czech spies’ (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-18617168) (22 August 2012).
34. Election speech by Brooke, Oct. 1951 (P.R.O.N.I., Dept. of the Prime Minister, PM/4/20/14).
35. Election speech by Brooke in West, North and East Belfast 24 October 1951 (P.R.O.N.I., Dept of the Prime Minister, PM/4/20/14).
36. Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 85.
37. Walker, *A History of the Ulster*, 77 & 91.
38. Objects of the Unionist Society (1951–1952) (Conservative Party Archive, CCO 2/4/18)
39. ‘From the Government Chief Whip’ *Brian Faulkner*
40. Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 291 and 302.
41. Chubb, *The Constitution And Constitutional*, 47–48.
42. Wood, *Britain, Ireland*, 105.
43. Quinn, *Irish Volunteers for Spain*, 29.
44. ‘To the electors of South Armagh’, Malachy Conlon’s election address, issued 5 June 1945 (P.R.O.N.I., Dept. of the Prime Minister, PM/4/20/8).
45. Ibid.
46. Wood, *Britain, Ireland*, 192.
47. Boyer, “Catholics, Christians,” 31.
48. Ibid., 34.
49. Othen, *Franco’s International Brigades*, 111.
50. Boyer, “Catholics, Christians,” 32.

51. Wood, *Britain, Ireland*, 200–203.
52. Delaney, "Anti-Communism," 901.
53. Election Communication from Gerald Annesley, Nationalist candidate for South Down (P.R.O.N.I., Dept. of the Prime Minister, PM/4/20/14).
54. *Irish News*, 11 June 1945.
55. Federation of Labour were a nationalist breakaway faction of the Northern Ireland Labour Party.
56. Conway, "Catholic Politics," 240.
57. Ibid., 237–238.
58. Miliband and Liebman, "Reflections On Anti-Communism," 19.
59. Redfern, "Winning the Peace," 32.
60. Deery, "The Secret Battalion," 10.
61. Othen, *Franco's International Brigades*, 111.
62. McInerney, *Northern Labour*.
63. Harbinson, *A History of the Northern Ireland*, 146–148.
64. Election Communication from Sam Napier for the Westminster Parliamentary by-election, 4 Nov, 1952 (P.R.O.N.I., Ulster Unionist Party Papers, D1327/16/2/37).
65. Help to Change the face of Ulster—Labour Election publication (P.R.O.N.I., Northern Ireland Labour Party Papers, D1327/16/2/37).
66. Klehr et al., *The Secret World*, 15.
67. Deery, "The Secret Battalion," 2.
68. Fried, *Nightmare in Red*, 144.
69. Global Visions and Parochial Politics, 442–443.
70. Goodman, "British Government," 62.
71. Ibid., 64.
72. Caute, *The Great Fear*, 21.
73. See note 58 above.
74. Harbinson, *A History of the Northern Ireland*, 146–148.
75. UNITY, Letter from the RUC HQ, 2 July 1948 (PRONI, Home Affairs, HA/32/1/922)
76. http://www.election.demon.co.uk/stormont/totals.html (accessed 06/04/17).
77. Communist literature and activities in NI (PRONI, Home Affairs, HA/32/1/515)
78. *History Ireland* Contemporary History, Features, Issue 6 (Nov/Dec 2012), Northern Ireland 1920—present, Volume 20.
79. Caute, *The Great Fear*, 47.
80. Haynes, "The Cold War Debate Continues," 76.
81. Brooke's Diary: 11 April 1950 (P.R.O.N.I., Brookeborough Papers, D3004/D/41).
82. Brooke's Diary: 8 May 1950 (P.R.O.N.I., Brookeborough Papers, D3004/D/41).
83. Landis, *Joseph McCarthy*, 16.
84. Ibid., 17.
85. Kirby, "Harry S. Truman's International Religious," 35–37.
86. Kirby, "Religion and the Cold War," 1.
87. Jones, "The Clergy," 188.
88. McFarland and Johnston, "The Church of Scotland's Special Commission," 348 and 355.
89. 'National and International Problems', Presbyterian Church in Ireland Annual Report 1949 (Union Theological College), 82–98.
90. 'The social and economic challenge of Communism', Presbyterian Church in Ireland Annual Report 1953 (Union Theological College), 89.
91. 'The nature of Communist propaganda' Presbyterian Church in Ireland Annual Report 1951 (Union Theological College), 80–83.

92. Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, Belfast 1951(Edgehill College Library).
93. Kirby, "The Church of England," 264 and 273.
94. Jones, "The Clergy," 191.
95. *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 7 August 1953.
96. *Atheistic Communism* a Papal Encyclical by Pius XI (1937) (Cardinal O'Fiach Library), 3–5.
97. Ibid., 9.
98. Ibid., 24.
99. Elliot, *The Catholics of Ulster*, 469.
100. Catholic Truth Society publication: *Communism and the home* by Douglas A. Hyde [a former Communist and convert to Catholicism] (1950) (Cardinal O'Fiach Library), 1–3.
101. Ibid., 16.
102. Christmas sermon 1946, D'Alton Papers (Cardinal O'Fiach Library, D'Alton Papers, ARCH/12/5 Box 20).
103. *Irish News* 20 February 1950, "Communist Agents in Ireland," 4.
104. Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 13–14.
105. 'Observations of the Presbyteries on the 1953 Report', Presbyterian Church in Ireland Annual Report 1954 (Union Theological College).

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Northern Ireland and the Far Left, c. 1965 – 1975

Marc Mulholland

ABSTRACT
The far left, defined as those to the left of orthodox communism, with few but important exceptions defined the Northern Ireland Troubles in essentially republican terms as a struggle to complete Irish national self-determination. Despite this lack of independent orientation, far left ideas fertilised both republicanism and loyalism in the 1970s. They are an important element in understanding the dynamics of ideological conflict in the period.

In reading the literature of the British far left one often comes across a Shakespeare quotation, first recycled in this tradition by Trotsky himself: 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune'.[1] For *soi disant* revolutionaries this is a comforting message. It suggests that a small number of zealous and ideologically trained cadres can seize upon sudden mass tumults (the flood which transforms working class consciousness) win a hearing for correct ideology, and within the historic twinkling of an eye build a mass party and surge into power. This appealed to a far left with virtually no electoral success in Great Britain and, in the 1960s and 1970s, an organisational presence in the Labour movement that was much weaker than that even of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The far left could hope that sudden events would transcend their marginalisation and vault them into political significance. In the late 1968, this revolutionary dream seemed to shimmer into substance. The far left suddenly achieved an extraordinary political prominence in a mass civil rights movement. But the United Kingdom's collision with '68 took place in an unanticipated corner: the de facto one-party state of Northern Ireland. Suddenly radical socialists were prominent political actors. What would they do with opportunity?

From the outset, the far left were hobbled in Northern Ireland by their ideological inheritance. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels had treated Ireland as somewhat *sui generis*. Rather than seeing it as already ripe for the transition to socialism they argued in favour of a separatist revolution, liberating Ireland from Britain. This, they hoped, would undermine the power of the ruling classes in Britain and overcome the antipathy of British workers to Irish immigrants which, they believed, inhibited the development of a militant class movement in Great Britain. The Communist International, similarly, treated Ireland as a colonial appendage to the imperialist powers. This meant that national independence rather than socialism was the priority for Irish revolutionaries. The communists opposed the 1921 treaty between Britain and Ireland and so inherited the

idea that the national revolution was incomplete. Willy-nilly they tailed anti-partitionist nationalism and republicanism. The Trotskyists looked, of course, to the early decisions of the Comintern as virtually sacrosanct. They inherited, therefore, a commitment to nationalist revolution in Ireland.

However, in line with Trotsky's elaboration of the theory of 'permanent revolution' in the 1920s and 1930s, the far left in Ireland were inclined to argue that only the working class was fully committed to the struggle for independence, that their struggle would flow seamlessly into socialism, and indeed that national independence for all of Ireland could only be meaningful in the form of socialism. They were grateful to find some basis for this argument in the writings of Ireland's one authentic Marxist hero and martyr, James Connolly, who had been executed for his part in the totemic 1916 Dublin rebellion.

The argument that only socialism could make Ireland truly independent rested upon the unconvincing proposition that the existing Free State/Republic of Ireland was in effect a neo-colony of Britain, under its economic control. More importantly for Trotskyist polemics, the partition of Ireland was seen to represent unfinished business. Ireland would not be free until it was reunited. However, in leftist thinking 'bourgeois' or 'petty bourgeois' nationalism, tied as it was to the limited economic prospects of Irish capitalism and the oppressive authority of the Roman Catholic Church, could never hope to appeal to the protestant working class majority in Northern Ireland. Socialism, therefore, was the only ideology that could unite the working class of the island of Ireland and overcome the partition of the island.

In general, therefore, the far left in Ireland tended to tailgate Republican separatism. This was always a somewhat uneasy relationship. At times a workerist and class-based politics on the one hand, 'identity politics' on the other, could diverge from Republican separatist narratives quite significantly. But each time, after a certain lapse, far left innovation fed back into republicanism rather than challenging its basic narrative. The main-stream far left would veer from the republican/nationalist heartland before returning to sow the seeds of new ideas. The significance of this radical socialist thinking in shaping mainstream Republican perspectives has not hitherto been adequately recognised.

This article examines the 'New Left' characteristic of these islands, which was usually Trotskyist. The influence of 'orthodox' communism on

the republican movement will not be discussed.[2] We begin by looking at the emergence of Trotskyism in 1960s Northern Ireland, first amongst protestant workers. This was followed by a 'New Left' tendency, led by Michael Farrell and Eamonn McCann, which increasingly orientated towards the Catholic and nationalist working class. The period of their pomp, the Civil Rights Movement, is passed over relatively quickly, as it has been covered in considerable detail by other writers.[3] There follows a discussion of the attitude of the British New Left to escalating crisis in the 1970s. This can be described, broadly, as tailgating the provisional IRA from a discreet distance. More heterodox leftist approaches can be found in organisations which developed an Irish base, the Militant Tendency and, in particular, BICO. The article concludes by estimating the influence of the radical People's Democracy group on provisional Republican thinking in the 1970s. It draws to a close before the Hunger Strikes of 1981, which launched Sinn Féin onto a new political trajectory substantially independent of radical left advice.

The socialist labour league

It was the Socialist Labour League (SLL) which first, in the 1960s, set up a franchise in Northern Ireland. Benefitting from the 1956 debacle of the British Communist Party, they had recruited Brian Behan, brother of the famous Irish author Brendan Behan. Whether through him or by other means, they won recruits in Northern Ireland—most if not all of whom were protestant. Little of their agitation had anything to do with the national question. They emphasised class issues such as unemployment. Sometime in the early 1960s, the SLL entered and soon took control of the Young Socialists (YS) wing of the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP), and they won a group of workers in the Draughtsman Union (DATA) in the shipyards.[4] Their local leader was Jackie Vance who lived in the intensely protestant and working class Shankill ward of Belfast.

Following the example of the British Labour Party, the NILP prescribed the Socialist Labour League at the end of 1964.[5] In the summer of 1965, their activists were expelled from those party branches in which they had a presence: Cromac and Woodvale in proletarian and protestant east Belfast. (*Belfast Telegraph*, 16, 17 June, 20 August 1965). On 11 August, Jackie Vance—who had been the Young Socialist representative on the NILP

Executive for two years—was formally expelled. Angus Wilson resigned in solidarity (*Belfast Telegraph*, 11, 15 September 1965). In October, the YS formally disaffiliated from the NILP, apparently taking with them the Belfast North branch of DATA (*Belfast Telegraph*, 20 October 1965).

The Socialist Labour League played no role in the Civil rights Movement other than to distribute a leaflet in Londonderry (hereafter Derry), after the Burntollet ambush of civil rights marchers in January 1969, calling for a one-day general strike. Derry City Action Committee stewards toured factories and work-places to repudiate the strike call (*Belfast Telegraph*, 8, 9 January 1968). By 1971, the SLL's Northern Irish leadership had 'left the movement in disillusionment'.[6] So ended the first 1960s Trotskyist group in Northern Ireland. By presenting a politics that more or less ignored the national question they had succeeded in recruiting a small number of Protestant working-class militants. But they were unable to build upon it. The next version would not be led by those of Protestant background, but by militants of the Catholic community.

The new left—building alliances

Michael Farrell was the leadership figure in a new generation of leftists that had emerged around the Queen's University Belfast Labour Club, formed in 1959. Its leading figures were Eamonn McCann, Michael Farrell and Erskine Holmes. Like the SLL, they were critical of mainstream Labour. In 1965, for example, Farrell for Queen's Labour condemned the Wilson Government's policies on immigration, Vietnam and Aden (*Belfast Telegraph*, 27 September 1965). Unlike the Socialist Labour league, however, they were interested in linking up with left-inclined nationalists.

Michael Farrell was of exceptional talent: he would later prove himself a calm, patient and physically courageous strategist. In February 1964, he had won the Hammarskjold Memorial trophy for political debate in an event organised by the Queens University Belfast 'Literific' (Literary and Scientific) Society. With Cyril Toman (a future People's Democracy comrade) he went on to debate in the Finals of an *Irish Times* organised competition with Anthony Clare (later a well-known radio-psychiatrist) and Patrick Cosgrove (the southern team emerging victorious) (*Belfast Telegraph*, 5 February, 2 March 1964). In 1965, Eamonn McCann, President of the Literific and Vice-Chair of the Queen's University Labour

Group, entered the all-Ireland debating competition, this time bringing home of the laurels of victory for Belfast.

Eamonn McCann was a hugely charismatic speaker with a sharp journalist's pen. His fiery disposition led him, the day before his 22nd birthday, to expulsion from Queen's University for being 'guilty of a criminal act … dishonourable and prejudicial to the interests of the university' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 9 March 1965). He had been found guilty of stealing 13 bottles of champagne, seven half-bottles of wine (of value £18 15 sh.) and an overcoat (£13) from the Botanic Inn Hotel on 23 February 1965, this guileless exploit following a boozy Literific dinner. 'By this drunken escapade he has deprived himself of a future', said his defence counsel, Richard Ferguson (himself later, and briefly, a liberal Unionist MP) (*Belfast Telegraph*, 2 March 1965). McCann took himself off to England where, in 1966, he fell in with the heterodox Marxist Irish Workers' Group centred on a former IRA internee, Gery Lawless ('the father of modern Irish Trotskyism'). There he discovered, as if by revelation, the power of Marxist critique.[7]

The influence of the Irish Workers Group (IWG), formed by émigrés in London in 1966, was no doubt a factor in the 'left unity' thinking of Farrell and McCann. The IWG favoured the building a formal Irish section of the Trotskyist Fourth International (*The Workers Republic*, May–June 1967). Its 1967 manifesto, which was supported by Michael Farrell, criticised the bifurcation of the Irish Labour Movement, which 'ape[d] the capitalists even to the extent of reproducing the regional divisions of the bourgeois-Imperialist partition!'[8] This simply meant, the IWG argued, that partition worked to the advantage of right-wing politicians, both nationalist and unionist: 'The left's primary failure is that it has allowed the most potent issue in Ulster politics—partition—to become the "property" of these Tory factions' (*Irish Militant*, May 1966). A Dublin branch of the IWG was formed in May 1967, followed by a Belfast branch a few months later, which included Farrell. Its supporters worked within the Labour Parties on both sides of the border.[9] By 1967, the IWG had disintegrated, but the strategic orientation of the New Left in Norther Ireland—working within the labour movement, but seeking to build a broader and cross-border left unity in and around it—was well established. By this point Michael Farrell was on the executive of the NILP.

Slowly, the radicals became disillusioned with their work in the NILP. They were more interested in transcending the narrow limits of the party. This was signalled by the formal establishment, on 4 October 1968, of the Young Socialist Alliance in Belfast, with Farrell as Chair, Anne Devlin as secretary, and members drawn from the NILP, the Republican Labour Party, the Young Liberals, and the nationalist National Democratic Party (*Belfast Telegraph*, 4 October 1968). More concrete, however, were the 'direct action' activities undertaken by the leftists in Derry NILP, led from 1967 by Eamonn McCann, now returned from England. This Derry New Left produced a 'perspectives document' mapping the way ahead that stressed a strategy of '*no enemies, only arguments, on the left*'.[10] To this end, they jointly set up a Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC). Their aim was to work with Republicans, Labour people, Liberals, and anyone else willing to agitate vigorously, using direct action, against the government. This prioritising of unity around agreed tactics meant, as McCann admitted later, that 'any perspective of building a clear minded political tendency in opposition to the dominant tendencies within the Labour or Republican movements was forgotten'.[11]

On 5 October 1968, a civil rights march in Derry, organised by McCann and his comrades, was stopped by police lines and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) attacked the crowd. 'We had indeed set out to make the police over-react', McCann admitted, 'But we hadn't expected the criminal brutality of the RUC'.[12] Direct action punctured the 'repressive tolerance' of the Northern Ireland state with spectacular success. Two days of rioting in Derry followed, pitching Northern Ireland into political crisis.

The people's democracy

Radicalism spread from working class Derry to student Belfast. On 9 October, Paul Foot, a luminary of the British New Left, spoke to Queen's University Union Debating Society. After the debate, 2000 students marched down to City Hall, only to find the space in front on the Hall occupied by loyalists marshalled by Rev. Ian Paisley. One thousand staged a sit-down protest in nearby Linen Hall Street (*Belfast Telegraph*, 11 October 1968). Upon their return, in a meeting that ran into the early hours, the students established the People's Democracy. This was, as McCann described it, 'a loose organisation without formal membership and with an

incoherent ideology comprising middle-class liberalism, Aldermaston pacifism and a Sorbonne-inspired belief in spontaneity'.[13] A 'Faceless Committee' of supposed political neophytes was established to act as coordinators, including Fergus Woods, Bernadette Devlin, Anne McBurney, and Kevin Boyle. In fact, most of the 'faceless committee' were already socialists, if not especially prominent activists.[14] Devlin and Boyle in particular tried to mediate between the majority of PD's membership and Farrell's vanguard Young Socialist Alliance.[15]

Burntollet

A NICRA demonstration in Armagh on 30 November swayed on the brink of outright violence, as Paisleyites turned up armed with cudgels to occupy the cathedral city. Prime Minister Terence O'Neill broadcast a call for all sides to pull back from a rapidly deteriorating civil order position and NICRA called a marching-truce in November 1968. Over the Christmas holidays, however, when the majority of students (and more moderate elements) were absent, People's Democracy agreed a four day 'long march' from Belfast to Derry in the New Year.[16] Farrell and Toman of the Young Socialist Alliance made it clear that they would have called the march on their own initiative in any case.[17] They were fully aware that the marchers would be harassed by loyalists. This was the point: 'What we really wanted to do', Bernadette Devlin recalled, 'was pull the carpet off the floor to show the dirt that was under it'.[18] It was a continuation of 'direct action' to expose 'repressive tolerance', but it risked stirring dangerous polarisation between nationalist catholics and unionist protestants.

Only about 50, half the number expected, set out from Belfast City Hall (*Belfast Telegraph*, 1 January 1969). Fred Heatley of NICRA, who participated in the march, estimated that of the 800 or so who joined it en route, only about 60 were students, the rest being 'mainly local County Derry men, women, boys and girls'.[19] These follow-travellers heard Farrell explain that the march was for the broad civil rights slogans of 'one man one vote' (universal equal suffrage in local government elections, rather than the existing ratepayers' franchise) and repeal of repressive legislation (the Special Powers Act of 1922, the Flags and Emblems Act of 1954). But

he added to this specifically PD slogans: ‘One man one job’ and ‘one family, one home’.[20]

The route took the marchers through the area of Burntollet Bridge in County Derry. Here they were attacked by loyalists (pro-British ultras), many off-duty police auxiliaries (the B Specials). As a civil servant close to Terence O’Neill recalled, ‘There’s no doubt that the B Specials in that area were an extremist force’.[21] The beaten marchers were treated as heroes and martyrs as they arrived in Derry, and rioting erupted. The RUC invaded and smashed up the nationalist Bogside district of the city. For Michael Farrell, the Burntollet march ‘gave the students—red flag flyers—credibility with the working class and the peasantry [*sic*]. This had not been seen elsewhere in Europe’.[22] When a PD demonstration turned violent in Newry the following weekend, however, there was a reaction against its ‘extremism’.

PD, nonetheless, felt confident enough to stand in the Stormont general election held in February 1969. The aim was to put forward candidates in no-hope seats: explicitly, to give a voice to the opposition; implicitly, to dissuade nationalists from tactically voting for the beleaguered moderate Unionist Prime Minister, Terence O’Neill. Its candidates were photographed for the press; all in suits (except for Bernadete Devlin). They were two teachers (including Malachy Carey from the town of Portglenone), three lecturers (Farrell, Bowes-Egan, Cyril Toman), five students (including Rory Mcshane, President of Queen’s Student Representation Committee), and one unemployed (*Belfast Telegraph*, 10 February 1969). Eamonn McCann stood separately as a New Left candidate for Derry Labour. The PD vote, 23,000 or 4.23 per cent, was ‘one of the real surprises of the election, polling much better than had been expected’.[23] Terence O’Neill was denied a sweeping majority against Paisley in his constituency of Bannside by Michael Farrell’s candidacy hoovering up Catholic votes. People’s Democracy had mobilised a nationalist/Catholic rather than a socialist vote.

In the aftermath, PD announced that it was shifting its strategy from marches to civil disobedience, suggesting occupations and the blocking of roads and bridges (*Belfast Telegraph*, 18 January 1969). This was partly a response to the negatives of New Left tactics hitherto employed. Kevin Boyle (who was a Law lecturer) admitted to an audience of Sociology students in Dublin that,

> By civil rights marches we have heightened the risk of sectarian conflict and polarised the community. Marches have become counter-productive, and are in danger of becoming redundant. We are now embarking on a policy of education aimed mostly at protestant groups (*Belfast Telegraph*, 10 May 1969).

But when PD pressed this strategy within NICRA (Farrell and Boyle having been elected to its executive in February), the moderates resigned from NICRA's leadership.[24]

Bernadette Devlin

Bernadette Devlin, a 22-year old student and as it happened a brilliant orator, emerged as clearly the most telegenic PD leader. She had begun as a 'convinced Republican' in her school days, moving to a concern for 'non-political social justice' at Queen's University, became socialist with PD, until finally,

> I had moved from traditional, mad, emotional Republicanism to socialism in the context of Ulster; now I was joining my new-found socialism to a belief in a united Ireland. Only in a thirty-two-county Ireland could socialism ever begin to work.[25]

When the Mid-Ulster Westminster constituency came up for by-election in April 1969, Devlin emerged as a possible compromise candidate for the anti-Unionist opposition (*Belfast Telegraph*, 27 February 1969). Despite worries from the socialist civil rights left that a joint opposition candidate would only facilitate the sectarian head-count, Devlin was finally accepted as a de facto nationalist Unity candidate (*Belfast Telegraph*, 14, 19 March, 2 April 1969).

Devlin's message was certainly New Left: 'If necessary we will take over the factories and run them for ourselves. That way there will be no discrimination because there is no sectarianism in the heart of the ordinary working man that is not put there by a bigoted Unionist Party in order to keep itself in power' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 8 April 1969). Her election rallies were held in divided towns to reach out the Protestants but this generally only led to scuffles and brawls (*Belfast Telegraph*, 16, 17 April 1969). On a record 91.5 per cent turnout, Devlin won 33,648 votes (53.3%), up from 27,168 (47.7%) scored by the Republican candidate in 1966. She was returned with a majority of 4,211 (*Belfast Telegraph*, 18 April 1969). She was the youngest woman, aged 21, to have been elected to Westminster.

Devlin's election brought New Left ideas to Parliament, but her vote had been along traditional nationalist/unionist lines.

Devlin's maiden speech, delivered off the cuff on 22 April as communal tensions and violence escalated in Ulster, was inflammatory, but raised the House in acclamation (*Belfast Telegraph*, 23 April 1969). Her fellow MPs were pleased to have a bit of '68 glamour. As the journalist Bernard Levin remarked, 'she was the first representative to be elected to Parliament, perhaps the first to the national legislature of any of the major democracies, of the younger generation's protest and revolt against conditions which they found materially adequate but spiritually impoverished'.[26] Northern Ireland had made New Left history.

August '69

Meanwhile the RUC again invaded the Bogside in response to rioting, this time badly beating Samuel Deveney, who later died. Communal violence, with the police forming an implicit alliance with loyalists against nationalist areas, now seemed a matter of time. The young left-radicals were pushed into the background, as protestant working class areas entirely rejected them as crypto-nationalists, and catholic areas readied for defence. The collision came, as expected, in August 1969, on the occasion of the loyalist Apprentice Boys parade in Derry. The Bogside barricaded itself and battled the police over three days. Bernadette Devlin, who was active in organising resistance behind the barricades, wrote that 'Derry suddenly found itself the centre of revolutionary Europe, setting a pattern which the revolutionaries of Europe will never forget'.[27] Derry's Catholics, however, largely rejected the suggestion that they were riven by class. They saw themselves as having participated in a *popular* uprising drawing in those middle classes—lawyers, doctors, businessmen—who served the community. 'How I had wanted so much to work amongst these people', wrote a Bogside doctor who organised a medical station for defenders, 'and become a part of this strange spirituality that was tangible in the streets!'[28] A group of European students arrived to show the revolutionary way by re-erecting barricades taken down by the Derry Defence Association. Paddy Doherty, leader of the Association, mobilised trade union workers at the docks to clear the road and dismiss the radicals.[29] In Belfast, where even worse violence ignited, PD had no representation at all on the Belfast Defence Committee that

organised to protect catholic areas from assault by loyalist and police mobs. Their few numbers behind the barricades did compose most of ephemeral literature produced amidst the turmoil, but it was vetted by IRA republicans.[30]

Nationalists in Belfast and Derry, bloodied as they were, felt they had narrowly escaped an even worse pogrom at the hands of loyalists. They welcomed the initial deployment of the British Army on the grounds of pragmatic defence, as well as for the humiliation it heaped on the police and Unionist establishment. As republicans worked to stir up deep-rooted traditions of hostility to British armed forces, leftists struggled to present a distinctive agenda. The New Left began to diverge one from another. Bernadette Devlin and Eamonn McCann were concerned that Michael Farrell had decided that only the catholic working class had progressive potential, and was giving up entirely on the Protestant working class.[31]

Unionist propaganda publicised the inimical role leftist plotting and subversion had in Northern Ireland.[32] But in reality the radical left were riding a wave rather than directing it. As McCann later admitted, the escalation of confrontation between the IRA and the state marginalised the left. McCann was a speaker at the Derry demonstration against internment in January 1972 at which the British army gunned down 14 civilians. He recalled later that this 'Bloody Sunday was … the time at which it became impossible to argue for a socialist approach. … The Parachute Regiment shot socialism off the streets'.[33] National and sectarian low-level war had come to Northern Ireland.

Press fascination with Bernadette Devlin MP slowly faded, though she continued to espouse militant New Left perspectives. In May 1972 she was interviewed for *Honey*, a magazine for teenage girls. In this she said, 'I am what the Women's Liberation Movement would describe as a token woman… Mind you, although I believe there is a need for women's liberation, there is also a need for Bricklayers Liberation, for Children's Liberation, for Gay Liberation—for all the liberation groups that there are around'.[34] Such universalism, commendable in itself, appeared increasingly irrelevant in the developing national conflict in Northern Ireland. In 1974, Bernadette McAliskey (as she was now called) lost her Mid-Ulster seat in a general election.

The IMG and the SWP

In general, the organised British far left kept its distance from republican paramilitarism. Gerry Healey, guru of the Socialist Labour League, told Sean Garland of the Official IRA, 'We are both opposed to British imperialism, but we will march separately. Is that a deal?'[35] This was generally the attitude of the New Left: offering solidarity at arms' length rather than active involvement with Republican armed struggle. Exceptions to this rule were individuals rather than organisations. Two erstwhile Trotskyists at least met grim ends, murdered by republicans as alleged informers. One, Peter Graham, was a member of the International Marxist Group (IMG) in Britain and of the republican paramilitary splinter group Saor Éire in Ireland. In 1971 he was killed by rivals in the disintegrating Saor Éire.[36] Kenneth Lennon, who had been in the orbit of the Socialist Labour League (SLL) while working at the Chrysler truck factory at Dunstable, near Luton, had been recruited by Special Branch as an informer and executed by the IRA in 1974 when uncovered.[37] There is little doubt that connections with the British far left, a 'soft' milieu ripe for British intelligence penetration, were suspect in Irish paramilitary eyes.

When the Republican Movement split between the 'Officials' and the 'Provisionals' (Provos) in 1969/70, it seemed obvious that the far-left would orientate towards the Officials, who was rapidly moving in a Marxist direction The Provos, in contrast, objected to the 'extreme socialism' of the Officials. 'The Marxist strategy of social revolution a la Che Guevara,' remarked a Provo apologist 'was rejected by the majority of the IRA activists throughout the country'.[38] As the Provos ramped up its military campaign an observer remarked that, 'In Northern Ireland we have this strange creature, an urban guerrilla movement of the 1970s that is nationalist to the exclusion of Marxism'.[39]

The far left, however, were impressed by the Provos' greater willingness to assert in arms the 'rights' of nationalists oppressed by British imperialism. Indeed, the Provos stressed its initially defensive role, placing the 'the nationalist ghettos under IRA control' to defend 'against Loyalist and British Crown forces'.[40] Only in October 1971 was the IRA's posture of defence and defence/retaliation replaced by a full offensive stage. The

British-based far left generally sympathised with this rationalising self-presentation, and the introduction in August 1971 of internment—imprisonment without trial—tilted the British far-left into the Provo orbit.

The International Marxist Group (IMG) had been formed in 1965, developing in the late 1960s a reasonably large public profile through its involvement in the student movement and the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. Its publications *Black Dwarf* and *Red Mole* reached a wide audience. While its membership by the mid-1970s was only about 800, from 1972 it organised as a ginger group campaigning for greater left unity. As such, its influence was considerably greater than its membership.[41] The IMG saw Northern Ireland through its preferred prism of Third World 'national liberation struggles' and argued that 'the left must support the right of the Irish people to use whatever methods they think fit in the struggle for self-determination'. The role of British socialists was not to criticise, but to agitate for British withdrawal. By 1971 their slogan was 'Victory to the IRA!'[42] The aim of the IMG, however, was not so much to contribute to the IRA campaign as to weaken the ruling order in Britain. As *Red Mole* put in 1972, 'nothing would destroy the credibility of the British ruling class more than to be soundly defeated in Ireland. It is… in the most immediate interests of the British working class for the British ruling class to be defeated and an understanding of this would immediately raise the revolutionary potential of the British working class'.[43] Tariq Ali admitted, however, that the IMG's 'Irish Solidarity Campaign' (ISC) alienated British workers unused to the idea of 'guerrilla warfare'.[44] After the first IRA bomb attacks in Great Britain in 1972, the ISC coyly changed its slogan from 'Victory to the IRA' to the vaguer 'Solidarity with the IRA'.[45]

The International Socialists/Socialist workers' Party (IS/SWP) inclined towards libertarian socialism in the 1960s and won some student support in 1968. In the 1970s it reoriented towards orthodox Leninism and began recruiting industrial workers. Its membership stood between 3,300 and 3,500 in 1975. The organisation developed close links with People's Democracy, with Bernadette Devlin coming close to the organisation and Eamonn McCann joining it.[46] McCann's belief that the Protestant working class could be won over to progressive politics had by 1971 diminished almost to vanishing point. 'Every day produced new evidence that the Catholics have been attacked *as Catholics* and that the Protestant working

class was enthusiastically in favour of this,' he wrote. 'Workers unity as a slogan seemed not just academic but positively perverse'.[47]

When internment of suspects without trial was introduced in August 1971, the IS set up a 'Labour Committee Against Internment', which called for release or 'fair trial' of internees. It was quickly occluded by the broader Anti-Internment League which simply called for release. Following Bloody Sunday the Anti-Internment League organised a protest march on 5 February 1972 in London, from Cricklewood to Whitehall. Some 20,000 turned out, mostly Irish expatriates, making it the largest demonstration in Great Britain protesting the army's actions in Northern Ireland during the entire Troubles. A Union Jack was burned and fighting with the police broke out along Whitehall and into Trafalgar Square. The following morning, the organisers were arrested in dawn raids.[48]

The SWP withdrew their allegiance from People's Democracy at the beginning of 1972 arguing that it had neither working class membership nor a correct socialist programme.[49] They switched to offering 'unconditional but critical support' to the IRA's 'armed struggle', a position that allowed them to distance themselves from IRA attacks that killed civilians, particularly when they took place on the 'British mainland'.[50] The SWP opposed IRA bombs in Britain because they 'serve to confuse Irish workers as to the best way to fight British imperialism and make it easier for the British bourgeoisie to inculcate chauvinist ideas into British workers'.[51] The SWP could support the IRA's war so long as it was confined to Irish towns and countryside, but not when it reached Great Britain. This rather cynical attitude created some tensions within the SWP. The Revolutionary Communist Group, a small group which split from the SWP in 1974, made truly unconditional support for the provisional IRA 'the central point of its platform and its practical work'.[52] Rather than seek to 'give advice' to Irish republicans, it concentrated on exposing excesses of the British state (and its rivals on the left).[53] Individual members, however, may have provided more than simply moral support to the IRA.[54]

With the libertarian socialist Big Flame group and the Socialist Workers Party, the IMG established the 'Troops Out Movement' in October 1973. As a 'solidarity movement' it gingerly avoided justifying IRA actions, simply demanding the withdrawal of the army and 'Irish self-determination'. It failed to take-off, however, and its membership never grew to more than a

few hundred.[55] As a writer for the IRA *Republican News* put it, it suffered to an extent from the worst of both worlds—being seen as pro-IRA, but also indulgent of the rancorous anti-Irish sentiment in Britain that wished to simply wash their hands of the savage tribes of Ulster (*Republican News*, 24 August 1974). English public opinion, wrote one Republican, was incorrigibly 'unamenable to… Troops Out Propaganda' and this would only change when the IRA was 'bombing their capital'.[56]

Ireland never became a major issue for radicals in Great Britain. It reeked rather too much of revolution in the raw. Both Special Branch and Irish republicans in England were understandably watchful of British leftists seeking to ingratiate themselves with the Irish Republican movement. Leftist sympathisers were advised that 'Irish groups are difficult to join. If you do go along, make sure that your credentials stand up to scrutiny'.[57] Few, of course, were inclined to take the risk. Tariq Ali's book surveying the leftist scene, published in 1978, simply passed over the Northern Ireland conflict in silence.[58]

Still, the far left did see some mileage in the Irish question as a stalking horse to attack the Labour Party; there might be expatriate Irish votes to win. In the general election of 1979, Roy Mason, until that point a notably hard-line Labour Government Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, was opposed in his constituency of Barnsley by Brendan Gallagher of the Troops Out Movement, backed by the Socialist Workers Party. Mason bitterly recalled this as a '"stunt" orchestrated by Irish republicans'. Gallagher won 638 votes, while Mason was returned with a 22,000 majority.[59] Pat Arrowsmith, who had been associated with the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign, an anarchist counterpart to the Troops Out movement,[60] also in 1979 contested Jim Callaghan's seat as an Independent Socialist stressing 'troops out'. She won a similarly minimal vote.

The British far left's theoretical position was essentially that Northern Ireland itself, having being carved out of an all-Ireland majority for independence, was illegitimate and 'irreformable'.[61] Britain simply had to get out, and only when that happened would working class loyalism collapse.[62] This left little room for evolution in its thinking. The radical left, as three sympathetic authors pointed out in 1979, was 'ambiguous on the question of political violence, but its practice is organised around the

demand “troops out” and “self-determination for the Irish people”. … Thus the central focus of the Left is on instances of repression and the Provisionals’ campaign … as if the political context’ made no difference.[63] The British far left had little to suggest other than an end to partition.

Militant and BICO

The Militant Tendency, in contrast, never supported the ‘methods’ of the IRA, and called for the labour movement to assert itself independently. This was difficult, as the Northern Ireland Labour Party was quickly falling apart under the pressure of events. It faded into ‘a middle class party of skilled workers and intellectuals … divorce[d] from the grass roots attitudes of the [working class] Shankill and the Falls,’ as an observer remarked in 1972.[64] Given that Militant was an ‘entrist’ tendency intent on working within Labour, in 1978 it had to retreat into a labour think tank, the Labour and Trade Union Group, which it ran as a front and as its ‘reformist’ shell.[65] In Great Britain, however, they controlled the Labour Party Young Socialists, and convinced it to adopt their line on Northern Ireland.

From the outset of the Troubles, Militant consistently argued for a labour movement based Workers’ Defence Force (*Militant*, no. 53, September 1969). Quixotic as this sounds, it turns out that the Northern Ireland trade unions did secretly consider establishing a ‘Trade Union Peace Corps’, first in September 1971, then again in 1974. A force of 3,500 men was mooted, in carefully designed uniforms, to patrol the Belfast ‘fear area’, estimated at one fifth of the city. It was even considered whether an ‘armed reserve force’ could take the place of the British Army in the future.[66] This plan had the sympathy of Ruaidhri Roberts, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, but it never left the drawing board, and there is no evidence that Militant supporters were involved in its formulation.

Militant campaigned on social issues that would not divide catholic and protestant. They supported, for example, the Trade Unions’ ‘Better Life for All’ campaign, started with government support in 1975, even though, as the IMG pointed out, it appeared ‘irrelevant to the main issue of British presence and the unresolved national question’.[67] In its theory, Militant rejected any constitutional or political reforms short of full socialism as merely reformist and in the context of Northern Ireland certain to accentuate sectarian division. In practice, this meant preaching socialist

transformation, which would allegedly make a united Ireland (in federation with Great Britain) palatable to both catholic and protestant, while in practice conservatively opposing any change in the constitutional status quo that might aggravate protestant anger.[68]

The Irish Communist Organisation (later the British and Irish Communist Organisation, or BICO), which had emerged in the mid-1960s, rejected Trotskyism. They supported the Chinese Communist Party and the Albanian Party of Labour against Soviet revisionism, and were enthused by the Chinese Cultural Revolution, though by late 1971 it was breaking away from Maoism (*Communist Comment*, 8, 29 January 1972). It began from a more or less standard 'united Ireland' position but by applying Stalin's understanding of what constituted a nation (a coherent economy within a particular territory) BICO drew conclusions regarding Northern Ireland quite distinct from the rest of the far left. In a pamphlet, 'One Island, Two Nations', published in June 1973, they argued that,

> The partition of Ireland was the outcome of the growth of two distinct Irish nations, each with its own economic life, and culture, its own religion and view of history, and each with its own closely-knit identity. …. [A]ny closer drawing together of the two peoples will begin only when the internal forces of reform in Southern Ireland succeed in establishing a genuinely secular state based on British standards of democracy.[69]

In the meantime, they saw in the Provisionals' campaign an assault on Northern Ireland's right to self-determination. On 5 September 1971, with some members of Newtownabbey and Coleraine NILP branches, they established the Workers' Association for the Democratic settlement of the National Conflict in Ireland. This produced for distribution 10,000 copies of 'The Working Class Solution to the National Conflict in Northern Ireland' (*The Two Nations: Workers Association Bulletin*, No. 1, November 1971; No. 2, n.d).[70] In April 1972, nine Workers' Association members occupied the Irish republic's Department of External Affairs building, to protest the Irish Constitution's claim as of right on the territory of Northern Ireland (*The Two Nations*, No. 5, May 1972). That same year, BICO engaged in talks with Ernest Elliott, Tommy Herron and Dave Fogel of the loyalist paramilitary Ulster Defence Association.[71]

BICO supported the nationalist-unionist 'power-sharing' settlement agreed in 1973, but they opposed the all-island Council of Ireland negotiated at Sunningdale that was to go with it. They duly applauded the

loyalist Ulster Workers' Council strike against Sunningdale of May 1974 as a 'great proletarian upsurge'.[72] BICO members, indeed, gave advice to the UWC and produced the daily strike bulletin distributed during the strike.[73] For a few months after the strike, BICO were involved in the leadership of the Ulster Community Action Group, a federation of community groups from protestant areas, mostly from the east and north of Belfast. Though associated with the loyalist UDA, it attracted those, particularly veterans of the NILP, put off by the UDA leadership's murderous sectarianism.[74] While never numbering more than about 50 members, BICO was intellectually highly influential. Their work, for example, was avidly read by David Trimble, an academic lawyer who would later lead the Ulster Unionist Party and negotiate the 1998 Good Friday Belfast Agreement.[75]

People's Democracy and the PIRA

Until 1971, the remnants of People's Democracy—now a small Trotskyist group under Michael Farrell's leadership—were close to the Marxisant Official Republican movement. But PD was already inclined to see the real revolutionary mettle as inhering in the nationalist people in popular revolt, and with internment in August 1971 they switched firmly to supporting the Provisionals as the hard edge of resistance.[76]

The Provos, it was true, were not Marxist. But from the outset Provisional republicans did espouse a socialism that was eccentrically 'third way' between Communism and Western social democracy. Its 1971 *Éire Nua* [New Ireland] argued for 'a reign of social justice based on Christian principles' which would strike a 'balance between Western individualistic capitalism…and Soviet state capitalism'.[77] Much stress was laid on decentralisation and cooperatives within a federal Ireland. Desmond Fennell, an intellectual who was considered to be 'an important non-republican resource' for the Provos,[78] wrote in an authorised pamphlet in 1972 that,

> a special reason we have for proposing the provincial system of government is that it gives major status in the new Ireland to that great historic province on which the Ulster Protestants have based their local patriotism. They call themselves Ulstermen, and it is as Ulstermen, in the fullest political sense, that we invite them to play their part in the building of an Irish community of communities.[79]

The idea that Ulster loyalism, in so far as it was rankled at the British government, might be considered an immature outer shell of an immanent Irish separatism was an important idea for the Provos in the 1970s. They were intrigued, for example, when Loyalists began to speak of the possibility of Ulster Independence in the aftermath of the 1974 strike against the Sunningdale Agreement. Late in 1976, the Provisionals and the Ulster Loyalist Central Coordinating Committee met in conference, deputing sympathetic lawyers to speak for them. Negotiations continued into early 1977, and a draft ceasefire agreement was drawn up. The Provisional Army Council turned down the deal by only one vote. The Loyalist strike of May 1977, seeking to dictate a tougher regime of repression, brought the negotiations to an end.[80]

Desmond Fennell, as an important intellectual fellow-traveller, wrote regularly for the Dublin-based Provo newspaper *An Phoblacht* under the pen-name 'Freeman'. In June 1976 he stated that an independent Northern Ireland, even as a permanent solution, was 'discussable and well-worth thinking about', so long as it ended English rule, recognised the Irishness of Northern Ireland's Catholics, gave nationalists control of those parts of Northern Ireland where they comprised a majority, and ensured equality of treatment. These were the core issues, he opined: 'Only a tiny minority would add "a Socialist Ireland" to that list' of minimum demands.[81]

If Fennell was the main intellectual influence on the Provisional leadership in southern Ireland, however, it was PD, and Michael Farrell in particular, who provided intellectual ballast, from the outside, for the Provos in the North. Jim Gibney, a Provo republican, recalled that,

> You had Michael Farrell and you had Bernadette McAliskey [Devlin's married name]. So there was a political leadership of sorts which organised the political support base for the people who came out on the streets. You know, People's Democracy were to the fore. They dominated the scene politically from about 1970 to about the 1975 period. They were the recognised political leadership of what we loosely called the anti-imperialist movement in this city and elsewhere.[82]

After the introduction of internment, People's Democracy formed a united front called the 'Northern Resistance Movement'—with Frank McManus MP as chairman and with Provo support—on 17 October 1971. Like the Provisionals (and unlike the Official IRA) it demanded the abolition of Stormont.[83] It fell apart in the course of 1972 over questions of the IRA's

accountability to the mass movement.[84] This was a perennial problem, for as McAliskey put it in October 1975, 'The building of a working-class movement requires mass organisation on an open basis', but 'because of its clandestine and militaristic nature, participation in "the [Provisional IRA] Movement" demanded the exact opposite'.[85]

In 1973, however, two PD leaders, Michael Farrell and Tony Canavan, imprisoned for disturbing the peace at an anti-internment demonstration, went on hunger-strike to demand political status. Following riots in their support, the Secretary of State William Whitelaw amnestied 100 short-term prisoners, including the hunger strikers. Bonfires were lit in some areas of Belfast in celebration. Encouraged by this, PD set up the 'Hostages Release Committee', to campaign against internment. In this they had guarded support from the Provisionals, but also from NICRA, the Communist Party of Ireland, the Official IRA Republican Clubs, and assorted radical groups.

It is clear that this PD initiative had a substantial impact on the northern Provos, as Gerry Adams recalled:

> We had failed to develop a means by which popular support could express itself, and the key failure of the leadership was a lack of an integrated strategy. … For lack of a republican political strategy, most nationalists in effect saw the [moderate nationalist] SDLP as providing the politics, the republicans as providing the army. The principal anti-unionist political success in 1973 did not derive from any initiative of Sinn Féin, but from the hunger strike undertaken by Michael Farrell and Tony Canavan of PD … and its associated demonstrations, from which was built the Political Hostages Release Committee.[86]

Impressed they might have been, but the armed volunteers of the IRA could not countenance equality with the small band of PD intellectuals. In April 1974, Belfast Sinn Féin accused PD of piggy-backing on the sacrifices of republican prisoners, and the Hostages Release Committee collapsed in August 1974 when the Provos denounced PD for their 'weak, quasi-revolutionary politics'.[87]

Still, there's little doubt that the PD did provide an important alternative to Fennell as a fellow-travelling source of strategic thinking. People's Democracy's contribution, however, was not terribly positive. PD in the early 1970s emphasised the entirely reactionary nature of the protestant working class, at least this side of a united Ireland. In 1970 Farrell warned that the protestant workers 'are drifting in a vacuum, a prey to Fascism, but at the same time more receptive to socialism than ever before because their

allegiance to the Unionist party is finally being destroyed'.[88] By 1973, however, Farrell's mood was far darker, warning that 'it is not so surprising that Ulster's fascists recruit so widely among working-class or sub-working-class elements—petty criminals, tartan gangs, etc. There is no point in appealing to them as fellow-workers because they have no working-class consciousness. They see themselves as Protestants not as workers and they have no real hostility to the ruling class beyond a certain jealousy'.[89] By 1975, PD were arguing that the protestant working class were a resource for fascism that could only be neutralised by an all-Ireland mass mobilisation of nationalists north and south.[90]

This was a grim prognosis, but it seemed to chime more closely with the northern republican experience of loyalism than the southern Provo optimism that loyalism was potentially progressive. *Republican News*, the Provisional IRA newspaper in the north, was far more inclined to openly identify with the catholic population against protestant loyalists than the Dublin based *An Phoblacht*, which shied away from explicitly sectarian language. *Republican News*, for example, greeted the success of the 1974 Ulster Workers Council strike with the headline, 'Loyalist Victory Threatens Catholic Community', and the determination that 'We Will Not be Bombed into an [independent] Orange Fascist State' (*Republican News*, 15 June 1974). Bob Purdie, the IMG's 'Ireland expert' and author of the pro-Provisional IRA pamphlet, *Ireland Unfree* (1972), was invited to write *Republican News*' analysis of the UWC strike. In this, he dismissed this protestant working class as dominated by sectarianism, without independent working-class tradition, and as catspaws of bourgeois Unionists.[91] Gerry Adams, writing in 1976 under the *nom de guerre* 'Brownie', spoke scornfully of 'Orange Fascism'.[92]

Northern republicans' fearful hostility to protestant loyalism certainly informed the furious riposte from to the North's *Republican News* to Freeman's article, cited above, that had declared the loyalist notion of an independent Northern Ireland to be 'discussable'. An article in *Republican News* not only outed 'Freeman' as Desmond Fennell, but declared it 'pointless to continue to debate with this reformist': 'His rationalisation is incompatible with Republican ideology … Continued propagation of these views is both dangerous and treacherous'.[93] This violent dismissal of any right of protestant self-determination, however it might be constrained, was

couched in heavily socialist language—it is not difficult to see the influence of People's Democracy.

In fact, People's Democracy was moving away from its depiction of the protestant working class as little more than fodder for fascism. It was becoming apparent that the mass of loyalists were socially conservative but economically centre-left in their attitudes, evincing a fairly typical 'workingclassism' as one loyalist put it.[94] They were certainly not seeking to remake society by anything like a fascist renovation.[95] In February 1976, PD split. Its 'Armageddon' perspective, anticipating a fascistic loyalist takeover and preparing for armed defence of the catholic ghettos—for which People's democracy had apparently established its own small armed wing—was explicitly abandoned by Michael Farrell in an internal document. Nonetheless, he insisted that the revolution was still to be based upon the insurgent catholic working class only. Farrell now argued for a strategy of mass action as an alternative to armed struggle. A minority rejected this turn, and formed the 'Red Republican Party', most of whose members eventually drifted into the political wings of the republican paramilitary groups. For Provisional republicans, this new turn was the inevitable outcome of PD's proclivity to 'textbook revolution, armchair pontification and ideological elitism'.[96]

Nonetheless, in *Republican News* Gerry Adams cautiously but with clear enthusiasm welcomed Farrell's major statement on the troubles and its background, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, as a 'very fine book'—'every Sinn Féin Cumann [branch] could do worse than to invest in a copy'.[97] It was becoming evident that the generation of Northern republicans coming to the fore, notably Gerry Adams, Danny Morrison and Tom Hartley, were seeking to mould a long-term military strategy combined with left-wing, community-based politics. The influence of the New Left in general and People's Democracy in particular was evident.[98] In 1977, the provisional IRA 'Green Book', the standard political training manual for provisional IRA members (or 'volunteers'), was rewritten by Gerry Adams to insist that 'all potential volunteers must be socialist in outlook'.[99]

The republican movement's new commitment to combining armed struggle with mass, community-based action was ultimately given traction by the struggle over the rights of prisoners. In 1976, republicans in the North resumed—not without friction—'broad front' activity with PD in

opposition to the withdrawal of de facto political status for IRA prisoners.[100] This was to eventuate in the Hunger Strikes support campaign of 1980 and 1981, and from there the rise of Sinn Féin as a mass political party, built bottom up and with a left-wing profile, in a characteristically New Left mode. This transition to a strategy combining direct action, electoralism and armed struggle took place under a new Northern leadership clearly influenced by their engagement with People's Democracy in the 1970s. They also carried with them PD's conviction that nothing progressive could be expected of the protestant working class until they had been abandoned by British imperialism. As Gerry Adams put it, the aim of Sinn Féin was to come to terms with the British, 'because it is only when the British colonial prop … is removed that Protestants will be able to embrace' their Irishness.[101] It would be the 1990s before there is any shift in this perspective. Socialist theorising was by now fully domesticated in the republican movement—in the Maze Prison republican block prisoners organised 'Irish *rangs* [classes], history *rangs*, Marxist *rangs*, and socialist *rangs*'[102]—and there was little felt need for outside guidance.

By the 21st century, Sinn Féin, having abandoned armed struggle, was a successful party on both sides of the border in Ireland. Its rhetoric and policies were clearly marked by the New Left heritage, making Sinn Féin in some respects the most successful inheritor party of '68 in all of Europe. But as the party became 'semi-constitutional' the far left in Northern Ireland was able to win independent support as a kind of alternative republican voice prioritising idealist resistance to compromise either with austerity or governance in a still partitioned Ireland. In 2016, Gerry Carroll in West Belfast and Eamonn McCann in Derry, both standing for a SWP front organisation 'People Before Profit', won seats to the Assembly. The tradition continued to exist.

Most unexpected, perhaps, was the eruption of an underground tendency on the Labour left. In 1970, a tiny fraction of the International Marxist Group, led by the talented intellectual Al Richardson, split away rather than abandon entry work in the Labour Party. As the 'Chartist Collective' it plugged away, through its Labour Committee on Ireland (LCI), calling for a return to Labour's 1920 'Peace in Ireland' policy favouring British withdrawal and all-Ireland self-determination with protection for minorities.[103] In 1984, an obscure backbench Labour MP, Jeremy Corbyn,

signed the LCI's 'statement of objectives' (*Telegraph*, 10 October 2015). In 2015, he was elected as leader of the Labour Party. Corbyn is more attached to the Irish republican peace process than he is to British counter-insurgency, but for much of the modern British electorate, never terribly invested in the Union as such, the distinction is perhaps academic.

Conclusion

In the early 1960s, the New Left had argued that a politics of class could overcome the division between catholic and protestant. As it turned out, it was the issue of civil rights that gave the New Left a dramatic prominence. Far left activists, organised primarily around People's Democracy, achieved an extraordinary profile. It was primarily repression of civil rights activism that reignited the dynamic of sectarian polarisation and the tradition of nationalist insurgency. Radicalism in Northern Ireland was crucial in that hot autumn of civil rights protest but very quickly the far left waned as an independent force. The influence of the New Left was, as in other countries, widespread and diffuse, contributing to the women's and gay liberation movements, for example, and its emphasis on 'small is beautiful' participatory democracy was evident in the admittedly quite nebulous proposals of the 1976 Peace People movement.[104] More importantly for the trajectory of the Troubles, it provided intellectual resources—too often overlooked—both for unionism (BICO) and for provisional republicanism (PD). The far left operated as an outsourced ideological hothouse for ideas that would be taken up, usually unacknowledged, by the much broader mass movements of unionism and nationalism.

The radicals' demo's did not change the track of Northern Irish history, but it pushed the train along, for good and ill. The significance of the New Left on Irish politics has often been underestimated. We need to acknowledge how much it moulded the politics of powerful anti-systemic movements. As an independent focus it continues to have relevance in an island with a rich, if far from straightforwardly socialist, revolutionary tradition.

Notes

1. *Julius Caesar*, (Act-IV, Scene-III). Quoted by Trotsky, *In Defence of October*, 6.

2. See English, *Armed Struggle*.
3. Notably Purdie, *Politics in the Streets* and Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68*.
4. Crossey and Monaghan, "The Origins of Trotskyism in Ireland," 56.
5. "Minutes of Organisational Sub-committee".
6. Whelan, *The Socialist Labour League*, 7.
7. Birchall, *Tony Cliff*, 277; and O'Connor Lysaght, "Early History of Irish Trotskyism," unpaginated.
8. 'Manifesto' of the Irish Workers' Group (1967).
9. O'Connor Lysaght, "History of Irish Trotskyism".
10. McCann, *War and an Irish Town*, 31.
11. Ibid., 33.
12. Ibid., 43.
13. Ibid., 50.
14. Arthur, *People's Democracy*, 32, 143.
15. Ibid., 39.
16. Hastings, *Ulster 1969*, 75.
17. Arthur, *People's Democracy*, 38.
18. Devlin, *Price of My Soul*, 120.
19. Heatley, "PD and Burntollet".
20. Egan and McCormack, *Burntollet*, 18.
21. Van Voris, *Violence in Ulster*, 95.
22. Arthur, *People's Democracy*, 42.
23. Lilley, "Ready to Fight On …".
24. Heatley, "The NICRA Split".
25. Devlin, *Price of my Soul*, 64, 87, 90, 119.
26. Levin, *Pendulum Years*, 262.
27. Devlin, *Price of My Soul*, 205.
28. McClean, *Road to Bloody Sunday*, 81.
29. Doherty, *Paddy Bogside*, 173–4.
30. Arthur, *People's Democracy*, 68–9.
31. Ibid., 87.
32. See Ballie and Mills, *The Manipulators*; Smyth, *Ulster Assailed*.
33. Fitzpatrick, *Boys of St Columb's*, 111.
34. Tagart, *Bernadette*, 369.
35. Mitchell, *Come the Revolution*, 241.
36. Purdie, "I Remember," unpaginated.
37. Robinson, *Reluctant Judas*, 19–20 and *passim*.
38. Mac an Ali, "The Provisional IRA," 143.
39. Nursey-Bray, "The Irish Marxists," 9.
40. Provisional IRA, *Freedom Struggle*, 27–28, 35, 37, 39, 44.
41. Mair, "Marxist Left," 168–9.
42. Callaghan, *British Trotskyism*, 137–8.
43. Shipley, *Revolutionaries*, 118–19.
44. Ali, *Coming British Revolution*, 229–30.
45. Shipley, *Revolutionaries*, 119.
46. Ibid., 134–35, 146.
47. McCann, *War and an Irish Town*, 88.
48. Reed, *Ireland*, 179–181.
49. Shipley, *Revolutionaries*, 144.
50. Callaghan, *Far Left*, 135.

51. Shipley, *Revolutionaries*, 144.
52. R.C.G., *Revolutionary Road*, 84.
53. Irish Freedom Movement. *Irish War*.
54. "Queen's University Law Lecturer".
55. Bell, *Troublesome Business*, 37.
56. Arnliss, "Nature of Strategy".
57. Saunders, *Alternative London*, 174.
58. Ali, *1968 and After*.
59. Mason, *Paying the Price*, 228–30.
60. Shipley, *Revolutionaries*, 197.
61. See for example, Geoff Bell, *British Labour and Ireland*, 6–7, 29. This was an IMG pamphlet.
62. See for example, the SWP pamphlet, *The Irish War*, 25–26.
63. O'Dowd, Rolston and Tomlinson, *Northern Ireland*, 201–02.
64. Anon., "Unity and Irish Labour," 6.
65. Crick, *March of Militant*, 157–58. On the origins of the L&TUG, see Hadden, *Common History, Common Struggle*, 378.
66. NIC, Committee Minutes 1/9/71.; NIC, Committee Minutes 25/8/71.; "Trade Union Peace Corps".
67. Bell, *British Labour and Ireland*, 33–4. For Militant, see Hadden, "Shankill Peace March".
68. Hadden, *Troubled Times*, 131 and *passim*.
69. Workers Association, *One Island, Two Nations*, 19, 27, 41.
70. Robert Fisk called the Workers' Association "a vaguely lift-wing and virtually Stalinist loyalist pressure group". *The Point of No Return*, 118.
71. Dillon and Lehane, *Political Murder in Northern Ireland*, 172.
72. Austen Morgan, "Socialism in Ireland," 210.
73. Woods, *Crimes of Loyalty*, 57–8.
74. Nelson, *Ulster's Uncertain Defenders*, 194–96.
75. Godson, *Himself Alone*, 29–30.
76. Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 206.
77. Sinn Féin, *Eire Nua*, 2.
78. White, *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, 172*.
79. Fennell, *A New Nationalism*, 10. The idea of 'community of communities' stretches back to anti-Jacobin Catholic social teaching. Adam Müller, *Die Elemente der Staatskunst* (1809).
80. Whale and Ryder, "Hot Line between the Hard Men".
81. Freeman, "Talk of an Independent Northern Ireland".
82. Feeney, *Sinn Féin*, 273.
83. Farrell, *Northern Ireland*, 285.
84. Kelly, *Longest War*, 203.
85. Holland and McDonald, *INLA*, 86.
86. Adams, *Before the Dawn*, 214–15.
87. Kelly, *Longest War*, 203–05.
88. Farrell, *Struggle in the North*, 34.
89. Mitchell, *Native vs. Settler*, 156–57.
90. Peoples Democracy, *Fascism*.
91. Purdie, "Why Sunningdale Collapsed"; Cf. Purdie, 'Loyalism—Where is it going?'.
92. Brownie, "Peace".
93. Anon., "Freeman: Devisive"; Anon., "RN answers 'Freeman''. See also Anon., "Freeman's views" and; Anon., "Freeman Hasn't a Clue".
94. Billy Mitchell quoted in Edwards, *UVF*, 147.

95. See Bruce, *The Red Hand*; for a leftist conclusion on these lines, see Probert, *Beyond Green and Orange*, 144.
96. Arnliss, "Split in People's Democracy".
97. Brownie, "The Orange State".
98. Ó Broin, *Sinn Féin*, 231–32.
99. Drake, "The Provisional IRA: A Case Study," 46.
100. Walsh, *Irish Republicanism*, 175–76.
101. Adams, *Free Ireland*, 124.
102. Morrison, *Walls Came Down*, 206.
103. Flynn, *Labour and Ireland*.
104. See Deutsch, *Mairead Corrigan*,129–143.

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Intersectional solidarity? The Armagh women, the British left and women's liberation

Brodie Nugent and Evan Smith

ABSTRACT
In 1980, three Republican women prisoners held in Armagh prison in Northern Ireland joined the hunger strike being conducted by male Republican prisoners in Maze Prison. Overshadowed by the fatal 1981 strike, the 1980 strike involved these women in Armagh, who challenged the traditional nationalist notion of the strong male warrior, while generating sympathy and solidarity across the globe, including with the far left and the women's liberation movement in Britain. This article will look at how the left and the women's liberation movement in both Britain and Ireland looked to portray these women within their competing narratives.

The anti-criminalisation campaign that began in Northern Ireland and quickly spanned to the Republic of Ireland and Britain was the first real opportunity to build a (pro-Republican) mass social movement since the anti-internment marches of the early 1970s. Culminating in two hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981, the anti-criminalisation campaign brought together the various Republican groups that existed in Northern Ireland, and generated wider support from the labour movement, the far left, the women's liberation movement, and various faith-based and human rights groups in both Ireland and Britain. While the hunger strikes are seen as a turning point in the conflict in Northern Ireland, F. Stuart Ross has argued that the popular anti-criminalisation movement '*outside* the prisons' was equally significant.[1]

In the 1970s, many in Britain still thought of the conflict in Northern Ireland as a distant and external issue, despite the regular threats of bombings in London and other cities in England. However the anti-criminalisation campaign created new bonds of solidarity, especially as the hunger strikes got underway in late 1980 and then again in early 1981. Although most of those who undertook hunger strikes were men belonging to the (Provisional) Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) at HMP Maze/Long Kesh Prison, three IRA women incarcerated in the women's prison at Armagh also participated in the first hunger strike, which took place during the final months of 1980. The involvement of these three Republican women drew a substantial amount of solidarity from the far left (predominantly the Communist and Trotskyist groups to the left of the Labour Party) in Britain, as well as from sections of the women's liberation movement in both Britain and Ireland. This can be seen as evidence of an *organic* intersectional and transnational solidarity[2] expressed by different political organisations and social movements, despite many of them remaining highly critical of the wider Republican movement and the armed struggle of the IRA.

By looking at the left wing and feminist press at the time, this article will explore how the far left and women's liberation movements in Britain demonstrated their solidarity with the three women in Armagh Prison on hunger strike in 1980 and their wider engagement with the anti-criminalisation movement. It will also examine how other women

imprisoned in Armagh who were involved in the no-wash (or 'dirty') protest against criminalisation were perceived by these groups. Particular attention will be paid to the massive amount of sympathy expressed in the left-wing and feminist press for Pauline McLaughlin, an Armagh inmate who became very sick during her incarceration. While overshadowed by the deaths of ten hunger strikers in 1981 which generated worldwide outrage at the intransigence of the British government, the anti-criminalisation protests of the Armagh women had a powerful impact on how socialists, feminists and Republicans viewed women within the Irish struggle. In the *Irish Times*, David Shaw wrote that the 'radical left in Britain did offer alternatives' to the bipartisan policy of criminalisation pursued by the Labour and Conservative governments during the late 1970s and early 1980s, but acknowledged that they 'never gained enough support'.[3] This article will show that with the case of the protests in support of the Armagh women, this allowed sections of the women's liberation movement to occupy the space normally taken up by the far left and let new forms of protest emerge, focusing on the female body as a political subject. While the far left publicised the struggle of the Armagh women, it was the women's groups that actively campaigned at the grass-roots level, both in Britain and in Northern Ireland.

From internment to criminalisation: the origins of the prison protests

In the understanding of its substantial nationalist minority, the six county statelet known as 'Northern Ireland' lacks legitimacy by virtue of the circumstances of its creation and the nature of its administration. This belief has been compounded by Catholics' lived experiences of political and economic marginalisation in Northern Ireland. In the late 1960s, attempts were made to address inequality in the Northern statelet by means of a non-violent Civil Rights Movement. As peaceful protests were frequently met with violent opposition, however, many nationalists came to share the belief that Northern Ireland was, by nature, irreformable.

Concluding that armed struggle was the only means by which an intolerable system of constraint could be modified, *Óglaigh na hÉireann*, or the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which had lain essentially dormant for some years, was inspired to take up arms once more. In December 1969, a

group of dissidents split from the 'Official' IRA and formed the Provisional IRA, which professed the dual purposes of protecting the Catholic community and bringing about an end to partition. In contrast to the 'Official' IRA and other nationalist groups, the Provisionals believed that armed struggle was the only means by which these goals could be achieved.[4] The Provisional IRA (hereafter the IRA) carried out attacks on people, agencies and institutions symbolic of British rule, in order to weaken and destabilise the British presence in Northern Ireland. It has been estimated that approximately one in every two people in Northern Ireland was closely associated with a victim of the conflict that ensued.[5] This conflict was fought on two main battlefronts—the streets and the prisons. From the mid-1970s, Northern Ireland's prison system was transformed into a battleground upon which the question at the heart of the conflict was played out upon prisoners' bodies, as the state attempted to affirm its right to sovereignty against Republicans' denial of the legitimacy of British rule.

In 1971, internment without trial was introduced in Northern Ireland, as permitted by the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act Northern Ireland 1922. Interned prisoners were granted 'special category' status, exempting them from obligations to engage in prison work and wear prison uniforms. The prison battle commenced in 1972, when Republican prisoners in the men's prison at Long Kesh and the women's prison at Armagh undertook a hunger strike in pursuit of the extension of special category status to include sentenced prisoners as well as interned prisoners.[6] The strike was successful, and, although the British Government was careful not to equate special category with 'political' status, the two were as one in the minds of the public and of the prisoners—both Republican and Loyalist—who could now categorise themselves as prisoners of war.[7]

In 1973, the Special Powers Act was replaced by the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act, incorporating the recommendations of the Diplock Commission which had reported to parliament in December 1972. The Diplock Report proposed that 'extra-judicial processes' should be adopted to deal with 'terrorists whose activities result in the intimidation of witnesses.'[8] The new legislation provided for the institution of juryless 'Diplock' courts, presided over by a judge sitting alone, which were to be utilised for all trials involving 'terrorist' offences. Confessions were the principle evidence in the majority of 'Diplock' cases, and a 1979 report

found that 75–85% of convictions in Northern Ireland were based solely on self-incriminating statements obtained in interrogation centres.[9] The British government received international criticism for its treatment of detainees in Northern Ireland interrogation centres on four occasions during the 1970s.[10]

By the mid-1970s, the perpetual violence in the North was evidence that the government's strategies were failing, and that a new approach was needed. In late 1976, a new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was instated, with Roy Mason replacing Merlyn Rees. Mason sought a much more confrontational approach to the Republican movement, embracing the policy of criminalisation (which had been first developed by Rees).[11] Complemented by the contemporary strategies of Ulsterisation[12] and normalisation,[13] criminalisation aspired to systematically redefine political violence as essentially criminal in nature.[14] The criminalisation policy was officially enacted in the Treatment of Offenders Act (Northern Ireland) 1976, which discontinued internment and revoked special category status for all prisoners sentenced after 1 March 1976.[15] In 1972, the British government had enacted special laws to establish special courts to try those accused of a special type of offence. In 1976, the British Government had denied that there was anything special about these prisoners. Many in the nationalist community found a fundamental contradiction in the government's position, and would have agreed with the assessment of Gerry Adams (then a rising figure within Sinn Féin) that the government's position 'flew in the face of logic and reality'.[16] Inside the prisons, Republicans resisted the policy of criminalisation using the only weapons at their disposal—their own bodies. The years following the revocation of special category status witnessed an ever-intensifying series of protests undertaken by Republican prisoners in both Long Kesh and Armagh.[17] These culminated in the hunger strikes of 1980–1981.

The first forms of protest against the removal of special category status were the infamous blanket protest (undertaken in Long Kesh only) and the non-cooperation or 'no work' protest (undertaken in both Long Kesh and the women's prison at Armagh), both of which began in 1976. In April 1978, male prisoners in Long Kesh escalated their campaign to include a no-wash protest and, in early 1980, events in Armagh drove the women prisoners to commence a similar protest. On 7 February, approximately 40 male prison warders were brought into Armagh from Long Kesh, ostensibly

to carry out a cell search. Several women were injured during the ensuing violent clash with the officers, many of whom were dressed in full riot gear. The prisoners were then locked into their cells for a period of 24 hours with no access to toilet or bathroom facilities. When eventually the women were allowed out for exercise, the bathrooms remained locked. With chamber pots overflowing in the cells and prison staff making every effort to prevent the women 'slopping out' in the wing, the Armagh prisoners felt they had no choice but to smear the contents of the pots onto their cell walls, thus following their male comrades onto the no-wash protest.

October 1980 saw seven men in Long Kesh undertake a hunger strike in pursuit of special category status. This initial group of seven was eventually joined by thirty more Republican prisoners from Long Kesh, as well as three women from Armagh Gaol—Mairéad Farrell (23), Mairéad Nugent (21), and Mary Doyle (24), who joined the fast on 1 December.

The Republican leadership outside the prisons had been reluctant to allow women to participate in the hunger strike, worrying that a strike in Armagh would divert attention away from Long Kesh and overextend the resources of the Republican movement, and that the leaders would be accused of 'forcing' vulnerable young women onto a brutal protest. They were also concerned that biological and psychological factors would make a women's hunger strike more susceptible to defeat. The women argued, however, that a cross-prison strike would overstretch the resources and will of the authorities,[18] and that the involvement of women—who, unlike the men, were not forced to wear prison uniforms—would also clarify that the true issue at the heart of the protest was the criminalisation policy, and not merely the desire of prisoners to wear civilian clothing.[19] The risk of female prisoners dying on the strike would, they argued, also place additional moral pressure on the authorities and increase support in the community.[20] Ultimately, it was agreed that female prisoners in Armagh would commence a hunger strike approximately one month after the men in Long Kesh, allowing their entry to coincide with the weakening condition of the men in order to place maximum pressure on the authorities.[21] In the statement in which their hunger strike was announced, Farrell, Nugent and Doyle declared, 'We are prepared to fast to the death, if necessary, but our love for justice and our country will live forever'.[22]

The three hunger strikers were immediately moved to share a double cell.[23] They were advised to drink eight pints of water per day, with salt. By 5 December, the women had lost between 8 and 10lbs each.[24] By 12 December, each of the women had lost approximately 15lbs,[25] meaning that they had lost more weight in their first 11 days than the men had lost in their first 26 days (the men's average weight loss being approximately 11½lbs on 21 November.)[26] The women's friends in Armagh noticed 'a marked and rapid physical change' in their condition, which belied official claims that there was no cause for concern.[27] Síle Darragh recalls,

> They were emaciated. The parkas were draped on figures that were little more than bags of bones. They had to keep hitching their jeans up to stop them falling off as they walked. Even their shoes seemed too big for their feet. They were so pale that their skin seemed translucent and looked like it was stretched so tightly over their faces that their cheekbones protruded unbelievably.[28]

Undoubtedly, the strike also took its psychological toll on the women, and the prison staff actively contributed to the strikers' torment. Doyle recalls,

> The cell was never without food. They took away breakfast and replaced it with lunch, took away lunch and replaced it with supper, etc. Jail food is notoriously rotten and cold: fat with a bit of meat through it. But all of a sudden the plates were overflowing with steaming hot chips that smelt so appetising. A screw would say, 'Those chips have been counted, so we'll know if you're eating'. They were taking blood samples every day and weighing us and would have known if we were eating. They were so petty.[29]

A smuggled comm (communication) from inside Armagh during the hunger strike reveals that the prison staff also delivered 'poison pen letters' from the outside to the three protesting women. Sadie McGilloway, the comm's author, caught a glimpse of one of the letters, which referred to the strikers as 'dying soldiers of Satan'.[30] In a subsequent interview, Farrell recalled some of the prison warders tormenting the three strikers, shouting into their cell comments such as 'Why don't you hurry up and die, you bastards?'[31]

Amid great confusion and despite some extremely close calls, the 1980 hunger strike ended with no fatalities on 18 December for the men, and 19 December for the women. The following year witnessed the deaths of ten Republican hunger strikers in Long Kesh. No women took part in the fast of 1981.

Although often overshadowed by the concurrent hunger strike undertaken by male prisoners in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh, and by the subsequent hunger strike which claimed the lives of ten H-Block prisoners in 1981, the anti-criminalisation protests undertaken by female prisoners at Armagh were highly significant both as a part of the broader Republican struggle against criminalisation and as a catalyst for the development of Republican feminism. Additionally, the protests—and particularly the hunger strike in December 1980—sparked international controversy and generated considerable support among left-wing and feminist groups and organisations in both Britain and Ireland, as this article will demonstrate.

The British left and Irish Republicanism before the anti-criminalisation campaign

Since the partition of Ireland at the end of the Anglo-Irish War in 1921, which occurred almost simultaneously with the establishment of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the British far left has generally supported the reunification of Ireland and, since 1969, has supported the call for the removal of Britain's military and political presence in Northern Ireland. This support for a free and united Ireland stemmed from the position of the Communist International in support of the national liberation struggles of all colonial and semi-colonial peoples across the globe, and from the Leninist assumption that revolutions in the colonial sphere would help spark revolutions in the West. Specifically for the British working class, Lenin argued in 1914 that '[t]he English working class will never be free until Ireland is freed from the English yoke'.[32] The CPGB had a substantial Irish membership and had close links to the Communist movement in Ireland, with C. Desmond Greaves helping to establish the Connolly Association in 1938, whose aim was to promote Irish Republicanism within the British labour movement.

In the era of decolonisation that followed the Second World War, the CPGB believed that the Irish Free State would gain full independence similar to India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (which did occur in 1949), but accepted the idea that British rule in Northern Ireland was a form of neo-colonialism to be challenged by the Northern Irish population (especially the labour movement). However, unlike its support for the insurgent national liberation movements that emerged in the British colonies, such as

in Malaya, Kenya and Nigeria, the CPGB chose to support the united Irish labour movement, rather than the Provisional Republican Movement embodied by Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Army. Before the advent of the conflict in 1969, the Party called for the remaining British troops stationed in the North to be removed, and believed that this could done peacefully. In some instances, the situation in Northern Ireland was seen as more akin to the political landscape in Scotland or Wales, thus requiring a strategy of devolution, rather than the strategy of insurgent national liberation needed in many other colonies. For example, in the 1958 version of *The British Road to* Socialism, the Party stated:

> The withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland is necessary to end the enforced partition of Ireland, and leave the Irish people free to establish their united Republic.[33]

Supporting the push for civil rights for the Catholic population in Northern Ireland, as well as an end to the 'police state' present in the North, the Party was sympathetic to the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, but was completely caught by surprise, like many of the British left, by the events of 1968–1969, which saw British troops intervene.

The main Trotskyist group of the period between the 1950s and the late 1960s was the Socialist Labour League (SLL), led by Gerry Healy. Like the CPGB, the SLL (and its predecessor, The Club) believed that the force for change in Ireland was the Irish labour movement and were very sceptical of the IRA as existed before the British intervention in 1969. In late 1958, Healy's group admonished Irish Socialists for the divorce of Socialism from the national struggle and opined:

> The day must come when Irishmen who hold these aims will form an Irish socialist party that can play a vital part in the national and social struggle.[34]

Meanwhile, the IRA was dismissed as having 'neither ideals nor courage'.[35]

The beginning of the conflict in Northern Ireland coincided with the explosion of the far left in Britain, with the radicalism of 1968 seeing the emergence of the International Marxist Group and the International Socialists, both Trotskyist groups that had broken away from being entrist factions within the Labour Party. For many on the left in Britain, the landing of British troops in Derry in August 1969 following the outbreak of violence in what has become known as 'The Battle of the Bogside' was

initially welcomed as bulwark against the sectarian violence of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the paramilitary police organisation known as the 'B Specials', with the International Socialists stating that '[o]nly the intervention of British troops stopped the pogrom'.[36] However, they believed that this intervention would be merely a temporary measure, and that the deepening of the crisis of Northern Ireland would give rise to opportunities for the left to exploit. For example, *The Black Dwarf*, the newspaper of a broad-based collective including the IMG, praised the people of the Bogside for having 'taken their lives into their own hands' and while applauding that this had been done by urban struggle, the paper called for the people of Ulster to 'turn the civil war into a revolutionary war'.[37] John Cunningham shows that Militant were sceptical of the deployment of British troops and instead called for 'joint defence committees' run by the labour movement, although Militant's presence on both sides of the Irish border was minimal at this stage.[38]

This view soon shifted as the British military presence came to be seen as an imperialist and invading force, linked to reinforcing the Unionist dominated Stormont parliament and the structures of the loyalist state. The rising stature of the (Provisional) IRA after 1970 as the vanguard of resistance against the British occupation split the British left. Taking their cues from Leon Trotsky's opposition to the anarchist terror of the Narodniks in late nineteenth-century Russia, Militant argued that the IRA's terror campaign against the British was adventurist and counterproductive.[39] In a special issue of *The Militant* dedicated to the situation in Northern Ireland, Brian Kinkead criticised the tactics of the IRA as 'indifference to the working class as a whole' and instead provoking sectarian violence, with the long-term goal of 'mak[ing] the stay of the British Army so expensive that the British Government would be forced to withdraw it'.[40] 'Instead of overthrowing British imperialism through the use of political and industrial activities of the working class', Kinkead wrote, 'the [IRA] leadership are attempting to overthrow it militarily'.[41]

Both the Communist Party of Great Britain (through the lens of the Communist Party of Ireland)[42] and the International Socialists held the view that the leadership of the IRA within the Republican movement signified a failure of the left to convince the working class in Northern Ireland of a Socialist solution to the conflict. As Éamonn McCann, a founding member

of the Belfast-based People's Democracy, wrote for the *International Socialism* journal in 1972, 'The Provisionals filled the vacuum created by the effective absence of the Left and the irrelevance of the right'.[43] The most supportive group in Britain towards the IRA (both the Provisional and Official wings) was the International Marxist Group, who had political reservations about the IRA's programme, but defended the organisation as an anti-imperialist force engaged in a guerrilla war with the British. As an editorial for the IMG's *The Red Mole* proposed in 1972:

> Both wings of the IRA have the military capacity and the support amongst the people needed to make the occupation of [Free Derry and Free Belfast] a very difficult problem for the British. The IRA does not need to force the British Army out at gunpoint, all they need to do is deny the British any peace…[44]

As the conflict in Northern Ireland entered a violent stalemate in the mid-1970s, the British left focused their activities for peace in the region through the Troops Out Movement (TOM), which was established in 1974 by the IMG, the CPGB, the libertarian group Big Flame and the Anti-Internment League. Jacob Murphy has argued that 'TOM was the leading organisation in the British Left campaign for the withdrawal of troops from Northern Ireland'.[45] With the experience of the IMG in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC), the TOM was devised on the model of the anti-Vietnam War movement, bringing together a broad cross-section of Labour Party and left-wing activists, as well as students and those involved in various peace campaigns (amongst many others). The TOM hoped that a focus on the casualties of the conflict 'would provoke an identical crisis whereby the British public would demand the withdrawal of troops'.[46] However, there were divisions inside the movement over how the withdrawal of troops would happen—it raised questions of whether the withdrawal would be immediate or a gradual process—and this led to accusations of 'reformism' by some of the smaller tendencies within TOM, namely the Revolutionary Communist Group and Workers' Fight (both of whom had split from the IS in the mid-1970s).[47] The TOM went into a temporary decline in April 1977, when the IMG and Big Flame sought to split the organisation's leadership, but like the rest of the British far left, after the anti-criminalisation campaign, a restructured TOM was rejuvenated for the early 1980s.[48]

The response by the British left to the anti-criminalisation campaign

The left wing press—the Morning Star, Socialist Worker and Socialist Challenge

As mentioned above, the anti-criminalisation campaign regalvanised support for the Irish Republican movement in Britain, particularly as the Thatcher government took a hard-line stance on the question of making any concessions to the Republicans, and the 1980 hunger strikes attracted much attention from the British left. However, the various groups on the British left were divided over their attitude towards the hunger strikers. The Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party and the International Marxist Group all supported the hunger strikers and their demands for special category status, with both the *Morning Star* and *Socialist Worker* demanding 'Don't let the hunger strikers die'.[49]

Militant, in contrast, were more apprehensive in their approach, explicitly stating that their support was on 'the basis of humanitarian grounds and not particular support for the IRA'. In the organisation's internal bulletin, some members questioned whether these 'sectarian assassins' could be called 'political prisoners' and stated that the 'methods of the Provos have themselves made it extremely difficult before now to take up this issue'.[50] John Cunningham has shown that Militant argued that any concessions made to political prisoners 'should be extended to all prisoners on a human rights basis' and the review of those sentenced in the no-jury Diplock courts 'should be adjudicated by the labour movement'.[51]

While there was considerable focus on the hunger strike by the seven men in Long Kesh, the newspapers of the CPGB, SWP and IMG all gave significant coverage to the Armagh women during their no-wash protest campaign and the eventual hunger strike. The *Morning Star*, *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Challenge* all announced the commencement of the hunger strike by the three women prisoners. The *Morning Star* called it 'a sharp new twist' in the hunger strike protests,[52] while *Socialist Worker*, writing in late November 1980, mentioned that 'three to five of the 28 women will join the strike', but also noted that 'Sinn Féin still hopes to persuade them not to go on strike'.[53] The reason for this, the paper

explained, was that '[i]t is not expected that they could endure a hunger strike for very long'.[54] *Socialist Challenge* announced the commencement of the hunger strike by the Armagh prisoners with the headline 'NOW IT'S TEN WHO FACE DEATH', and called for mass demonstrations by the labour movement in Britain in support of the hunger strikers, warning that 'silence could well prove fatal for Mairéad Farrell and her comrades'.[55]

These newspapers sought to humanise the women involved in the hunger strike. Mairéad Nugent's mother, Margaret, toured Britain to raise awareness about the strike and gave interviews to both the *Morning Star* and *Socialist Worker*. In the interview with Margaret Nugent, *Socialist Worker* emphasised the terrible conditions faced by her daughter and the other women at Armagh, writing that Mairéad was '[w]ithout anything to do but stare at the walls around her, walls that since February she has smeared with her excrement and with her menstrual blood'.[56] It continued:

> Mairéad does not do this because her conditions have driven her insane, though they might have done.
>
> She does it because the alternative is to leave her own dirt on the floor where she sleeps. And that is her only choice, if you call it 'choice' at all. Like another 31 Republican women prisoners in Armagh jail, Mairéad is denied access to toilet and washing facilities because she refused to be classed as a 'criminal'.[57]

Both newspapers conveyed Margaret Nugent's message that Mairéad and the other two women on hunger strike at Armagh were determined to continue with their strike and that they entered into this on their own terms. They were neither 'dupes' of the IRA leadership, nor 'weak' women who were likely to break, as suggested by some within the Republican movement. The *Morning Star* quoted Margaret as saying:

> They have made their decision. It is their choice. It is not up to us.
>
> I just cannot imagine what they will look like after 40 days of hunger strike—but it is a choice I know they are determined to follow through…
>
> I know my daughter is determined to win or die.[58]

The *Socialist Worker* stated that Margaret didn't try to change Mairéad's mind, because she respected her too much for that and ultimately, the 'hunger strike… is the last hope the Republican prisoners have'.[59]

Socialist Challenge reminded its readers that for the hunger strikes and the anti-criminalisation movement to succeed, there needed to be a large mobilisation of people in sympathy with those on strike ready to challenge the position of the government. In early December, the newspaper warned that first hunger striker could die before Christmas, and called for the fight for political status to be 'stepped up' before this occurred. To reiterate this point, the paper quoted the latest statement from the Armagh women:

> Mobilise your resources and use every possible means to pressurise the British government into conceding our just demands before death and all its stark reality intervenes here.[60]

In the last edition before the Christmas of 1980, the newspaper warned that 'it now seems certain that a number of Irish political prisoners will die an agonising death over Xmas' and called for the Labour Party and its supporters to speak out against this.[61] In the event of any death, the newspaper declared that the national Ad Hoc Irish Hunger Strike Committee would hold a picket outside Downing Street, with regional demonstrations in Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow and Cardiff to follow.[62]

In the end, however, the 1980 strike was called off amid great confusion before any deaths had occurred. In the aftermath, *Socialist Challenge* portrayed it as a temporary relief from the deadlock of the strike and in the words of People's Democracy, a 'limited victory'. But referring to a statement from Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams, acknowledged that not much had changed from before the strike and warned of the 'possibility of another hunger strike'. At the same time, the newspaper pointed to 'unquestionable victories' in the campaign, such as the emphasis on mass action, the thousands of people mobilised against the H-Block conditions and the enduring pressure applied by the community in both Ireland and Britain against the British Government.[63]

The Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Review

While the CPGB, SWP and IMG all covered the hunger strike in their newspapers, only the SWP also discussed the strikes in the monthly journal, *Socialist Review*. The CPGB's other publications, the fortnightly *Comment* and the monthly *Marxism Today* had no coverage of these strikes or the

wider anti-criminalisation movement. In the pages of *Socialist Review*, the SWP's Irish correspondent, Shaun Docherty, emphasised the importance of the 'propaganda war' being fought between the hunger strikers and the British government and the fact that '[t]he extent to which their struggle will be successful depends on the response to their tremendous sacrifice'.[64] As *Socialist Challenge* maintained, Docherty said that the hunger strike campaign needed support from the labour movement in Britain to put pressure on the Labour Party to challenge the Thatcher government. Writing in November 1980, Docherty stated:

> It is the job of socialists in this country to build a mass campaign of support for the demands of the hunger strikers that will put enough pressure on the government to make it concede on all issues [regarding political status]…
>
> [W]e must seek to transform this support into a movement that will force the government to concede.[65]

In the months after the strike ended, Chris Harman wrote that the anti-criminalisation campaign had challenged the centrality of militarism to the Republican struggle, but acknowledged that '[t]he "left" still tolerate the subordination of everything to the military struggle'.[66] As Kieren Allen from the SWP's Irish sister organisation, the Socialist Workers Movement, wrote, 'The Provos are clearly seen as the fighters against British imperialism and the most consistent agitators for a united Ireland'.[67] Of the British far left political organisations, the SWP was probably the most influential of the groups that covered the hunger strikes, especially compared with the CPGB, IMG and Militant (although the much smaller Revolutionary Communist Group and the Revolutionary Communist Tendency also gave considerable coverage to the strike and the wider Irish Republican struggle). However, within the party's coverage of the strike, there was little outside of the pages of *Socialist Worker* that mentioned the female hunger strikers in Armagh. It is not that the SWP focused on the hunger striking men at Long Kesh, but the women were not explicitly mentioned either—the strikers were only discussed as an entity that did not differentiate between the two groups.

The Troops Out Movement

A newly restructured TOM was revived by the anti-criminalisation campaign and the TOM was part of the campaign in Britain to mobilise people against the continued 'criminalisation' policy of the British government. *Troops Out*, the journal of the TOM, consistently featured stories on the Armagh women as they began their no-wash protest in February 1980, and gave coverage to campaigns by various women's liberation groups, primarily the Belfast-based Women Against Imperialism. The journal reported on the 33 women who were involved in the protest inside Armagh Gaol, giving details about the unsanitary conditions faced by these women and how these changed as months went by. At the beginning of 1980, the journal described the conditions:

> The wing the women are held in is the largest block in the prison, with three stories, and on the Governor's orders, only one orderly is detailed to clean it. So it is filthy. The women themselves have been on 21-hour lock up, so they have only three hours to clean themselves, their clothes, and their cells. There are two baths for the 33, the washroom has no hot water and regularly flood, there are no mops and one brush, Wing dirt gets walked into cells landing bins are not emptied. The place is maggot-infested.
>
> The warders have cut down even more on toilet visits—twice a day only, and women are allowed only two sanitary towels daily, regardless of need. They have had to relieve themselves in the cells.[68]

In March 1980, the journal reported the mass attack on 7 February by prisoner guards on the Armagh women, with assistance from riot officers from Long Kesh, and '[a]fter this [incident], no-one was allowed to wash or use the toilets'.[69] In May 1980, the journal recounted the more severe conditions that followed as the prisoners stepped up their protest and the wardens sought to punish them:

> The women had to dump their chamber pots through the spyholes and the windows of the cells. These were then blocked up by the warders, since when the women have had to smear excreta and empty urine in the cells themselves, or in the corridors during their one-hour exercise period.[70]

To protest these conditions and the violence experienced by the prisoners, the journal publicised the work done by Women Against Imperialism and the large demonstration held on International Women's Day 1980 in Belfast in solidarity with the prisoners, as well as subsequent speeches.

The journal dedicated significant space to these mobilisations by Republican women and the August/September 1980 issue dedicated a page

to the campaigning being carried out by former Armagh prisoner Rose McAllister in London, containing an excerpt of a speech given at Caxton House the previous month. McAllister concluded her speech by emphasising:

> There isn't one girl or one woman on protest there who's a masochist, who enjoys that protest or enjoys living in filth and dirt for five months as it stands now. They don't enjoy it, but they're doing it and they're doing it for one reason and one reason only. And everyone in this room should understand the urgency of this, they're doing it because they're political prisoners. They're prisoners of war that's going on the North of Ireland that the British public are being duped about.[71]

While the coverage of the dirty protest by the Armagh prisoners was extensive, once the hunger strike began, the three women were subsumed by the wider reporting on the two strikes at Long Kesh and Armagh. The December 1980 issue of the *Troops Out* journal featured an article profiling each of the men on hunger strike;[72] however, the women did not receive the same in-depth treatment.

The Revolutionary Communist Group and the Revolutionary Communist Tendency

The Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG) and the Revolutionary Communist Tendency (RCT) were two breakaway groups from the International Socialists in the mid-1970s, with the RCG forming first in 1974–1975, and then the RCT breaking from this group in 1977–1978. John Callaghan argued that both of these groups differentiated themselves from the rest of the left by their uncritical support for the IRA and the INLA.[73] The RCG had a 'Third Worldist' position and endorsed the theory of a labour aristocracy, which purported that Western workers directly benefitted from the exploitation of people in the developing countries. For the RCG, the struggles of the peoples in these developing countries would provide the basis for revolution in the West. Therefore, the RCG's political activism was primarily organised around anti-imperialist issues, such as solidarity with Irish Republicanism, the anti-Apartheid movement[74] and anti-deportation campaigns.[75] This was reflected in the title of their newspaper, *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* The split between the RCG and the RCT was originally over support for the anti-Apartheid Movement and the

African National Congress (ANC), with the RCG, led by David Yaffe, supporting the ANC and the RCT, led by Frank Furedi, supporting an 'independent working class standpoint', while publicly criticising the ANC.[76]

The RCG were part of the TOM and gave significant coverage to the anti-criminalisation campaign in their newspaper. The newspaper had a special section dedicated to the RCG's campaign, Hands off Ireland!, which often featured the prisons struggle, and the newspaper also employed a special prisons correspondent. In July 1980, the newspaper highlighted that the prison authorities were 'increasing efforts… to force these prisoners to give up the rights associated with special category status and hence in effect to withdraw political status from them', and part of this was removing inmates who had been granted special category status before 1976, such as Marian Price.[77] The RCG concluded that the 'release of Marian Price at this was designed not only to ensure that she did not die in prison… but also to distract public attention from the worsening conditions of the protesting prisoners in Armagh'.[78] The following issue reprinted a statement published in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, celebrating those on protest in Armagh with this statement:

> In the face of long periods confined to their cells, and the denial of basic facilities, such as adequate medical facilities, the courageous prisoners have refused to bend the knee to foreign rule and are an example of Republican resistance even when in the clutches of the enemy.
>
> WE SALUTE THEM![79]

On the other hand, the RCT started its own campaign, Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act, in 1979, which sought to bring other anti-criminalisation groups in Britain under the leadership of the RCT. A flyer for its initial run of demonstrations to support this campaign claimed support from a variety of left-wing groups and social movements, but the RCT did little to foster good relationships with others. In one pamphlet, the RCT claimed:

> The left always tries to downplay the question of national oppression. In this way it tries to turn the Irish War into a trade union issue or a matter of human rights and civil liberties.[80]

The RCT were particularly critical of any left-wing condemnation of the IRA's violent campaign, declaring, 'The left is ready to denounce the violence of the oppressed—especially when it is conducted in the heartlands of the oppressor, in Britain itself'.[81] This, the Tendency argued, left them with 'no role to play on Ireland other than a pressure group on the Liberal and Labour Parties'.[82]

In contrast to this, the RCT's Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act campaign called for two things—mass demonstrations against the PTA and in support of the H-Block/Armagh prisoners, and for rank-and-file trade unionists to campaign inside the Trades Union Congress to take a decisive stance against the British occupation of Northern Ireland. At the beginning of the hunger strike in Long Kesh in October 1980, the RCT called for a march from Hackney Town Hall to Stoke Newington in support of the hunger strike, with four slogans daubed on the flyer:

> TROOPS OUT OF IRELAND NOW!
>
> SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE IRISH PEOPLE!
>
> SMASH THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT!
>
> PRISONER OF WAR STATUS FOR IRISH ANTI-IMPERIALIST PRISONERS![83]

The other tactic of the Smash the PTA campaign was to call for rank-and-file trade unionists to put pressure on the TUC and the Labour Party to challenge the existence of British troops in Northern Ireland. As the 1981 hunger strikes began, the campaign published a pamphlet asking for agitation on this issue at the forthcoming TUC Congress. The first of the five points of the proposed motion included in the campaign's pamphlet stated:

> This branch/union/trades council
>
> - deplores the failure of the official labour movement to support the demands for political status of republican prisoners of war in the Six Counties of Ireland.[84]

The pamphlet then ended with the plea, 'Don't let the prisoners in H-Blocks and Armagh struggle in vain! Fight for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Ireland!'[85]

This rank-and-file pressure was part of the RCT's broader slogan on the 'Irish War', which was 'Bring the War to Britain'. On one hand, it was 'a

call to make the Irish War an issue in the British labour movement'; on the other hand, as the Tendency recognised, it also 'implie[d] support for a violent attack on the British state—not only in the Six Counties—but in Britain itself'.[86] With its origins in the Leninist idea of converting an imperialist war into a civil war[87] and the early Irish Communists inside the CPGB,[88] the RCT's slogan also echoed the slogan of the militant US leftist group, the Weathermen Underground, whose slogan was 'Bring the War Home'.[89] However, despite the revolutionary rhetoric of the RCT, its influence upon the anti-criminalisation movement was limited by its sectarianism.[90] Although many outside the two groups could not differentiate between them, the approach of the RCG and its emphasis on the prisoners fit more with the wider currents within the Irish Republican movement in the early 1980s. On the other hand, the revolutionary and violent rhetoric of the RCT came at a time when the IRA were arguably moving away from pursuing a primarily militarist strategy—inspired by the anti-criminalisation movement and the hunger strikes.[91]

The case of Pauline McLaughlin

While attention was given to the no-wash protest by the 33 women imprisoned in Armagh Gaol and the three hunger strikers by sections of the British left, within this coverage by these groups, another prisoner was also highlighted—the young Pauline McLaughlin. McLaughlin was a young woman who was imprisoned in Armagh serving an 'indefinite' sentence,[92] and also suffering from mental health issues. Despite having been sentenced before 1976, McLaughlin was denied special category status. She originally joined the prison protest movement in an attempt to gain this special status, but she became very ill and the Republican leadership within the prison reluctantly had to order her to give up the protest in order to preserve her health[93]As a result of her time on the protest, McLaughlin suffered from stomach problems and was unable to digest food, causing her to rapidly lose weight. Shuffled between the prison hospital and Armagh, McLaughlin's condition was viewed as potentially fatal and there were calls by the anti-criminalisation movement for her to be released on compassionate grounds. However, the Thatcher government refused to do so, with Northern Ireland

Secretary Humphrey Atkins claiming that her condition was 'not at present critical'.[94] Atkins continued:

> While Miss McLaughlin's health does give cause for serious concern, it is considered in the light of all the advice available that there are insufficient grounds for taking the exceptional course of releasing her on licence from the indeterminate sentence and using the Royal Prerogative to remit the balance of the fixed terms.[95]

The *Morning Star* dedicated a significant portion of an issue to highlight the case of McLaughlin, declaring, 'Every day she remains in the prison her life is in danger—a senior consultant from a Northern Ireland hospital has diagnosed a psychogenic vomiting complaint'. The newspaper quoted government minister Michael Allison as saying, 'If there is inescapable evidence that the condition is not self-induced we would respond by releasing her on medical grounds… But it may be that she is manipulating her illness'. The newspaper then asked what 'inescapable evidence' did Allison need, writing:

> That final, fatal cardiac crisis? Or have they rather been gambling with her life, refusing to free her while the H-Block crisis was nearing the climax, fearing that if they did that the government might appear weak?[96]

Socialist Challenge claimed that the McLaughlin case 'graphically illustrates the barbarity of Armagh' and that 'Pauline's treatment is typical of that perpetuated by the British on Irish political prisoners'.[97]

Numerous demonstrations and political actions were called upon to highlight McLaughlin's case, with pickets outside Whitehall and Downing Street, emergency resolutions of various organisations being sent to the Northern Ireland Office, and various protests against the doctors on staff at Armagh Goal. These actions were co-ordinated by the Armagh Co-ordinating Committee, run out of a feminist collective space (A Woman's Place on William IV Street) in London. These protests were given significant coverage in the *Morning Star*, particularly when the actor Frances de la Tour attended a demonstration outside Downing Street in December 1980.[98] Pickets were also established outside the General Medical Council offices to condemn the role that GMC members played in the inadequate treatment experienced by women in Armagh Gaol.[99]

In January 1981, McLaughlin was finally released from prison on medical grounds, although it is most likely that the campaign for her release, in amidst the wider anti-criminalisation campaign and the hunger strikes, contributed to this outcome. Some of the press in Ireland suggested that McLaughlin was released at a time when the British government was in talks with Sinn Féin over the continuation of the no-wash protest, but Ann Rossiter argues that the grassroots movement campaigning for McLaughlin's release succeeded 'in embarrassing the British government and pinpointing the plight of the women prisoners at the heart of the establishment'.[100] While the left wing press did highlight the plight of McLaughlin, the campaign on the streets was led by feminists in Britain and Ireland.

Feminism and Irish Republicanism

Feminism has been intricately linked to Republican politics in Ireland, with the dawning of the suffrage movement coinciding with the rise of radical militant nationalism around the turn of the twentieth century. Women in Ireland had collectively organised in 1881 to administer the remarkable Ladies Land League, the legacy of which inspired the foundation in 1900 of Inghinidhe na hÉireann (daughters of Ireland), which can be seen as the first Republican feminist organisation. The professed objective of the Inghinidhe was to pursue 'Freedom for our nation and the complete removal of all disabilities to our sex', and the notion that these two objectives could be divorced from one another was strongly rejected.[101] The Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), formed in 1908, united Protestant and Catholic women in pursuit of the vote; however, the radical nationalist women of the Inghinidhe and similar groups harshly criticised the IWFL for its implication that Irish women could (or should) exercise democratic rights within a British occupied state.[102] Despite their differences, however, the Inghinidhe and the IWFL were able to unite in solidarity over a number of common projects, working together to organise soup kitchens during the 1913 Dublin Lockout and to lobby for free meals for Dublin schoolchildren.[103]

Following the Easter Rising of 1916, Irish nationalism continued to grow increasingly militant, and Cumann na mBan—the women's organisation auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers (IRA)—replaced the Inghinidhe as the most

significant nationalist women's group. Cooperation with the feminist movement continued, with Cumann na mBan and the IWFL uniting in 1918 to support Constance Markievicz's successful campaign to become Westminster's first female MP.[104] Still, such cooperation was a rarity and only occurred when feminist and nationalist interests happened to coincide. Irish women activists continued to debate with one another over the question of whether women's emancipation could or should be pursued separately from Irish national liberation.

The divisions which had begun to appear amongst Irish women during the revolutionary years were deepened and solidified by the partition of Ireland in 1921. In a partitioned Ireland, Rosemary Sales points out,

> Women were divided from each other both geographically and politically. Northern women were separated by the border from Southern women, but within Northern Ireland itself, Catholic and Protestant women were divided on community lines.[105]

Partition stalled and disrupted the growth of the feminist movement both north and south of the border. In the South, it was hampered by the reactionary conservative nature of the Free State, while in the North, it was hampered by conflict, communal divisions and constitutional uncertainty.

In Northern Ireland, feminist leaders initially hoped to foster a collective women's identity which would transcend ethno-communal divisions and unite women around common issues.[106] Attempts were made to unite women cross-communally via what Theresa O'Keefe labels 'lowest common denominator politics' and Fidelma Ashe describes as 'transversalism'.[107] Essentially, feminist leaders encouraged women to cooperate in advocating for those interests which were shared by women of all backgrounds (such as workplace equality), while attempting to avoid engaging with issues which may raise the dreaded 'national question'.

In 1975, the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (NIWRM) was founded upon a philosophy of transversalism. Although the NIWRM officially avoided taking a stance on the question of partition, it indirectly expressed support for maintenance of the link with Britain by claiming that effective reform was possible within the existing framework, and by pointing to the lack of feminist reform in the Republic of Ireland as evidence that partition offered women a better chance than unification.[108] Many nationalist women were isolated from this women's movement by its

thinly veiled support for the union. In October 1975, a split occurred which saw the foundation of the Socialist Women's Group (SWG) which, although critical of the IRA's armed struggle, believed that women's liberation could only occur within the context of a united Socialist Ireland.[109] In 1977, the SWG dissolved into the Belfast Women's Collective (BWC), remaining simultaneously anti-occupation and anti-armed struggle.

Republican women were alienated from the NIWRM and even the SWG/BWC by these organisations' strong opposition to paramilitary violence.[110] As a result of this alienation, Republican women sought to collectivise amongst themselves, leading to the development of modern Republican feminism as a distinct phenomenon. In 1978, Women against Imperialism (WAI) was formed as an anti-occupation, pro-Irish unity feminist organisation sympathetic to the Republican cause. WAI would become highly significant during the crucial prison protest years of 1980/81, when the refusal of the NIWRM and BWC to support the Armagh women's struggle further galvanised the divisions within the feminist movement and demonstrated once and for all that 'feminism could not exist outside prevailing structures of power, which in Northern Ireland were inescapably defined by ethnicity and class'.[111]

In addition to solidifying the divisions among feminists in the North and fostering the growth of Republican feminism, the prison protest years were also significant in strengthening ties of solidarity between Republican feminists and feminists abroad, particularly in Britain.

Women's liberation in Britain and the conflict in Ireland

Despite its political and social importance, the history of the women's liberation movement (WLM) in Britain has yet to be fully written, and, until recently, much of the historiography of the British WLM was based on autobiographies and first-hand accounts by WLM activists, often dealing with the fractious relationship between these WLM activists and Socialist organisations that they grew out of.[112] One of the criticisms of the existing historiography of the WLM in Britain has been its focus on white, middle class women and its lack of intersectionality, its failure to address other ethnicities and minority cultures.[113] Natalie Thomlinson's recently published *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968–1993* looks at how African-Caribbean and South Asian women interacted

with the WLM,[114] while Ann Rossiter's doctoral dissertation has examined the 'Irish Question' within England's WLM in the 1970s and 1980s.[115]

Rossiter has argued that the WLM in England had predominantly overlooked the events taking place in Ireland during the 1970s, with *Spare Rib* and *Outwrite* being the only mainstream feminist publications to address the issues facing Irish women in any significant manner.[116] Before the Armagh Group and Women Against Imperialism—two groups that emerged out of the anti-criminalisation movement—there were two short-lived WLM groups dedicated to the issues facing Irish women and the 'Irish Question'. The first was the Women on Ireland Collective, which lasted from 1969–1970 until 1974. The politics of this group was informed by People's Democracy (and particularly the activism of Bernadette Devlin therein), and looked at the situation in Ireland as part of a wider anti-imperialist movement, supporting Republican women as a vital part of the revolution.[117] The Women and Ireland Group (WaIG), formed in 1976, has been described by Rossiter as a 'socialist-feminist autonomous collective'.[118] Despite springing from a particular section of the British peace movement that argued that women were inherently pacifists, the WaIG rejected pacifism and expressed broad support for Republican women of all stripes. With several WaIG members also belonging to the IMG and Big Flame, the group fought against the gendered pacifism expressed by many sections of the English WLM.[119] As the anti-criminalisation movement and the issue of the Armagh prisoners gained momentum, more feminist groups emerged to campaign on the issue, expressing solidarity with the female prisoners.

The women's liberation movement in Britain and the Armagh women

The role of the women's liberation movement in Britain and Ireland in campaigning for the women prisoners in Armagh is well documented.[120] In Northern Ireland, the group Women Against Imperialism organised demonstrations outside Armagh prison on International Women's Day in 1979 and then again in 1980, which were attended by over 500 people.[121] WAI was informed by a Socialist feminist and pro-Republican outlook, with members linked to People's Democracy, the Irish Republican Socialist

Party and Sinn Féin. WAI held a tribunal investigation into the conditions and treatment of prisoners in Armagh and published a report on this in October 1980, just as the men in Long Kesh were commencing their hunger strike. With this development, the report warned:

> Despite the increasing support for political status, the British government has so far refused to budge on the issue. As a result of this intransigence… word has come from the 'blanket men' in Long Kesh that selective hunger strikes are to start from October 27th. If the British government does not concede the five demands of the prisoners, it seems certain that the hunger strike will result in deaths. We do not know how this latest development will affect the women on protest in Armagh—but it obvious that both the men and women on protest are in grave danger unless the fight for political status can be won in the near future.[122]

In Britain, WAI had close connections with corresponding feminist groups, particularly in London, and with the Troops Out Movement, which publicised the WAI's journal *Beansaor*. As mentioned above, the main organising feminist group in London campaigning on these issues was the Armagh Co-ordinating Group, which organised many of the pickets in London at Downing Street, Whitehall and the General Medical Council offices. Rossiter has suggested that the Armagh Co-Ordinating Group was 'arguably the most successful of all the women's groups focused on the Irish National Question in the London area' because it decided to 'campaign on the single issue of the prisoners'. This was done because of humanitarian concerns for the plight of women in other countries, but also because there were 'clear republican sympathies' within the WLM in Britain that needed expression.[123] As numerous scholars have described, there was a continual debate within the feminist groups that organised around the Armagh issue over whether Republicanism and feminism could happily co-exist.[124]

It is also important to remember that many of those involved in the various WLM groups in Britain were also members of various left-wing groups (mostly to the left of the Labour Party, but a number from the Labour left were also involved in the group Labour Women for Ireland, which sent several delegations to Northern Ireland during the 1980s).[125] Many did not seem to compartmentalise their Socialist and feminist activism and saw them as informing each other—what we now call 'intersectional'.[126] However, when these women demonstrated outside

Armagh Gaol or outside Whitehall on the issue of solidarity with the Armagh women, this was primarily done under the auspices of the WLM.

Alongside these grass-roots feminist groups, the WLM magazine *Spare Rib* was also important in publicising the Armagh women's experiences in Britain. The magazine gave publicity to the International Women's Day demonstration, organised by WAI, and other campaigns that focused on women prisoners in Northern Ireland, as well as various conferences held in Dublin and Belfast to discuss feminism and Republicanism. As mentioned above, these discussions reverberated throughout the WLM in both Britain and Ireland, but *Spare Rib* admonished that 'discussion seemed to centre around the question of whether support for republicanism *or* feminism was the most important for Irish women'.[127] The magazine proposed, 'Inevitably there are differences between both movements but there are strong links too'.[128] Throughout 1980, each issue of the magazine gave some coverage to the no-wash protest being carried out by the Armagh women, and to the plight of Pauline McLaughlin. As the hunger strike peaked, coverage increased in the magazine, with the December issue including the headline 'IRISH WOMEN STAND UP!' in support of the Armagh women.[129] Irish journalist Róisín Boyd argued in the January 1981 issue that political status for those in Armagh was important because women were now at the forefront of the Republican movement and were just as likely to face imprisonment for political activity as Republican men.[130] In October 1981, Boyd interviewed Bernadette Devlin McAliskey —former member of People's Democracy and the Irish Republican Socialist Party, and then Public Relations Officer for the National H-Block/Armagh Committee—for the magazine, which included the following exchange:

> RB—Some feminists say they feel reluctant or refuse to support the Republican movement because they say it is militaristic and appears to be dominated by men and they are afraid women's needs will be subordinated. What's your response to that?
>
> BMcA—I think it is a cop out. Some women within the women's movement use arguments that are use against the women's movement in defence of their own positions—for example claiming that the women prisoners who started to hunger strike in Armagh didn't have minds of their own, they they're being led astray by male-oriented elitist organisations, they're actively taking an anti-women line. They're quite happy so long as the women's movement stays in its slot but doesn't actually challenge the basis of society as a whole. If they're not prepared now to fight the basic fight of the prisoners when it comes down heavy on us

> women they're going to chicken out of that fight. The truth is that though women are oppressed, as yet women are not interned for being women, though that day may come.[131]

Even after the 1981 hunger strike had ended, the magazine continued to give coverage to the issue of the women in Armagh. The November 1981 issue contained a letter from the mothers of several of those who had been on hunger strike in Long Kesh, as well as Margaret Nugent. Their letter read:

> The women's struggle is the same as the men's in the H blocks: they are the same freedom fighters for a united Ireland.
>
> As feminists and progressive women you can't remain silent, while the people of Ireland give their lives in a struggle, as long as the British remain on our soil…
>
> There will be no freedom for women in Ireland, while British soldiers remain in our country, while our daughters and sons are attempted to be criminalised [sic] in British jails and our women and children are killed and maimed by plastic bullets.[132]

Conclusion

Most of the British left recognised that the anti-criminalisation campaign had revitalised the Irish Republican movement on both sides of the Irish Sea and that despite the inability of the campaign to obtain political status for those imprisoned, a grassroots political mass movement had emerged that offered an alternative to the violent campaign waged by the IRA and the INLA. In Northern Ireland, the initial benefactor of this movement was the reformed People's Democracy, whose members held important roles in the National H-Block/Armagh Committee; while in Britain, the campaign revived the influence of the Troops Out Movement. The electoral gains made by PD, combined with the massive public support galvanised by the anti-criminalisation campaign during the hunger strikes, helped convince Sinn Féin to end their policy of abstentionism and to adopt instead a policy of gaining power via the ballot box, while simultaneously sustaining the armed struggle of the IRA.[133] Besides the RCT and RCG (and later Red Action),[134] the British left preferred the path of the mass political movement rather than the IRA's violent strategy, and expressed solidarity with those active in the anti-criminalisation campaign. However, the British left had to accept that although alternative sites of Republicanism had been

built in the early 1980s, the militarism of the IRA still dominated the Republican movement.

The no-wash protest by the Republican women imprisoned in Armagh Gaol and the hunger strike by Mairéad Nugent, Mairéad Farrell and Mary Doyle brought attention to the experiences of Irish women involved in the Republican struggle in both Ireland and Britain. The British far left press followed these protests, with the pages of the *Morning Star*, *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Challenge* all covering the developments in Armagh as well as the campaigns outside the prison walls—although these campaigns were, at the local level, mostly led by women's liberation groups, rather than the left-wing parties. Furthermore, *Spare Rib* was quite influential in disseminating news about the struggle of the women in Armagh amongst feminists in Britain (as well as amongst much of the English speaking world). Organisationally, the left still deferred much of its campaigning to the Troops Out Movement, which operated as a broad left campaign that reached beyond the traditional audience of the various far left groups. Particular emphasis was given to the plight of inmate Pauline McLaughlin who was not part of the hunger strike, but who suffered from illness due an inability to eat sufficient food.

While the CPGB, the SWP and the IMG all broadly supported the anti-criminalisation campaign and the women's hunger strike, Militant was much more ambivalent and supported the campaign for political status purely as a human rights issue, even though the rest of the left acknowledged that the wider issue of the British occupation of Northern Ireland was an integral part of the prisoner's campaign. On the other side of the fence, the RCG and the RCT called for 'direct action' by British activists in solidarity with those in prison in Long Kesh and Armagh. The RCG maintained a focus on prisoner solidarity and highlighted the issue in their weekly paper, *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, while the RCT called rank-and-file trade unionists to compel the TUC to explicitly support the Irish Republican cause, and also promoted the slogan 'Bring the War to Britain' (even though the slogan was not widely received amongst other activists and left-wing organisations). As David Shaw wrote:

> The radical British left tried to offer support to the hunger strikers but it was an incoherent mess. It was riddled with divisions over ideology and lacked a leadership that could bring together the assorted disparate groups in Britain that supported the hunger strikers.[135]

In conclusion, it seems that the issue of the women's protests in Armagh was given much needed publicity in Britain by the left-wing press, but much of the grass-roots campaigning was left to various feminist groups, such as the Armagh Co-ordinating Group and Women Against Imperialism, who launched significant demonstrations in London, Belfast and Dublin between 1979 and 1981. Many of these women were part of the various left-wing groups or the TOM, but organised around this issue as *feminists* or as *Republicans* (or even *Republican feminists*). While an intersectional solidarity was expressed with the women in Armagh, the British far left acceded much of this to the women's liberation movement.

Notes

1. Ross, *Smashing H-Block*, 5.
2. See: Featherstone, *Solidarity*, 5–7.
3. Shaw, "The Irish in Britain".
4. MacDonald, *Children of Wrath*, 151.
 The 'Official' IRA promoted a twin strategy of the armed struggle alongside a grassroots mass movement against the British presence in Northern Ireland. The campaign of violence against the British Army lasted until May 1972, when the organisation agreed to a ceasefire.
5. Fitzduff and O'Hagan, cited in Moore, "'Nobody's Pretending that It's Ideal'," 104.
6. Corcoran, *Out of Order*, 3; Hennessey, *Hunger Strike*, 12; Moore and Scraton, *The Incarceration of Women*, 74.
7. Hennessey, *Hunger Strike*, 12.
8. Coogan, *On the Blanket*, 52–3.
9. Murray, *Hard Time*, 69.
10. The British government received international criticism for its treatment of detainees in Northern Ireland interrogation centres from the European Commission of Human Rights in 1976, from the European Court of Human Rights in 1978, and from Amnesty International in both 1972 and 1978.
 See Murray, *Hard Time*, 9.
11. McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 160.
12. 'Ulsterisation' refers to the shifting of the primary responsibility for day-to-day 'peacekeeping' from the British Army to the local security forces (the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment), the membership of which was overwhelmingly drawn from the unionist community. See Corcoran, *Out of Order*, 11.
13. 'Normalisation' aimed to secure widespread acceptance of coercion as a legitimate means of combating terrorism. See Corcoran, *Out of Order*, 11–12.
14. Corcoran, *Out of Order*, 12.
15. Ibid., 33.
16. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, 71–2.
17. Republican prisoners incarcerated in other institutions within Ireland (e.g. Crumlin Road and Mountjoy Gaols) or in England (e.g. Brixton and Parkhurst Prisons) also participated in several protests during these years.
18. Corcoran, "Talking about Resistance," 107.

19. Hennessey, *Hunger Strike*, 91.
20. Corcoran, *Out of Order*, 40.
21. Corcoran, "'We had to be Stronger'," 121.
22. Doyle, Farrell, and Nugent, "Statement from Armagh Gaol," in Darragh, *John Lennon's Dead*, 103–4.
23. Doyle, "Mary Doyle," 222.
24. Hennessey, *Hunger Strike*, 94.
25. Ibid., 114.
26. Ibid., 94.
27. Darragh, *John Lennon's Dead*, 105.
28. Ibid., 108.
29. Doyle, "Mary Doyle," 222.
30. Sadie McGilloway, Comm to Kate McKinney, in Brady et al., *In the Footsteps of Anne*, 235.
31. Mairéad Farrell, quoted in Fairweather, McDonough, and McFadyean, *Only the Rivers Run Free*, 227–8.
32. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-determination".
33. CPGB, *The British Road to Socialism*, 24.
34. Special Correspondent, "Ireland's Workers Needs a Party Based on Connolly's Teachings," 6.
35. Ibid., 5.
36. "Ireland," *International Socialism*, 1/40 (October/November 1969), 2.
37. "Ulster: Turn the Civil War into a Revolutionary War," *Black Dwarf*, 14/21 (30 August 1969), 8.
38. Cunningham, "The Militant Tendency Comes to Ireland, c.1969–89," 201.
39. Ibid., 200.
40. Kinkead, "Provisional IRA Strategy will not Defeat Imperialism," 2.
41. Ibid.
42. In 1973, *Marxism Today* ran an article by the CPI's Dublin Area Secretary, Tom Redmond, which argued, 'Wherever working class leadership is absent the tactics, strategies and content adopted are those of the middle class'. Redmond further claimed that the 'social composition of the Provisionals was more middle class [than the Official IRA] and mainly rural'. Redmond, "The Forces in the Irish National Liberation Struggle," 169–70.
43. McCann, "After 5 October 1968," 11.
44. *The Red Mole*, 48 (7 August 1972), 1.
45. Murphy, "'Ireland's Tragedy is Britain's Disgrace'," 4.
46. Ibid., 13.
47. Ibid., 40.
48. Ibid., 41–2.
49. *Morning Star*, 17 December 1980; *Socialist Worker*, 22 November 1980.
50. Militant, *Internal Bulletin* (March 1981), 6–7.
51. Cunningham, "The Militant Tendency Comes to Ireland," 208.
52. *Morning Star*, 17 November 1980.
53. *Socialist Worker*, 22 November 1980.
54. Ibid.
55. *Socialist Challenge*, 3 December 1980.
56. *Socialist Worker*, 13 December 1980.
57. Ibid.
58. *Morning Star*, 9 December 1980.
59. *Socialist Worker*, 13 December 1980.
60. *Socialist Challenge*, 10 December 1980.

61. *Socialist Challenge*, 17 December 1980.
62. Ibid.
63. *Socialist Challenge*, 1 January 1981.
64. Docherty, "Ireland: Bitter Climax," 4.
65. Docherty, "Don't Let Them Die!" 22.
66. Harman, "Ireland: After the Hunger Strike," 20–1.
67. Allen, "Who's Who on the Irish Left," 23.
68. "Attacks on Women Prisoners," *Troops Out* (March 1980), 3.
69. "Attacks on Women Prisoners," 3.
70. "Armagh Conditions Exposed," *Troops Out* (May 1980), 12.
71. "Rose McAllister Speaks Out Armagh Prison," *Troops Out* (August/September 1980), 5.
72. "The Hunger Strikers—They're Not Criminals," *Troops Out* (December 1980), 6–7.
73. Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 145.
74. See: Brown and Yaffe, "Practices of Solidarity," 34–52.
 As Brown and Yaffe mention elsewhere, the RCG portrayed the areas that it worked in as part of a global struggle, as demonstrated by the slogan, 'Brixton, Belfast, Soweto—One Struggle! One Fight!' Brown and Yaffe, "Non-stop against Apartheid," 232.
75. Abrahams, "Citizenship and Rights," 107–11; and Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 105, 118.
76. Fitzpatrick, "The Point is to Change It," 221–2; and RCG, *Statement on the Expulsion of a Chauvinist Grouping in the RCG*.
77. "Marian Price Freed," *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* (July/August 1980).
 Marian Price was one of two sisters given life sentences in 1973 for terrorism offences. Imprisoned in England, the two sisters, along with two men, went on hunger strike, but were force-fed by the prison authorities. The strike lasted 200 days, before the Price sisters were transferred to Armagh. Sweeney, "Self-immolative Martyrdom," 342.
78. "Marian Price Freed".
79. "Armagh Goal," Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! (September/October 1980), 12.
80. RCT, *Ireland's Victory Means Britain's Defeat*, 15.
81. Ibid., 17.
82. Ibid.
83. RCT, 'Demonstration in Support of the H-Block Prisoners', October 1980, RCT flyer.
84. Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign, *TUC Hands off Ireland!*, 15.
85. Ibid.
86. RCT, *Ireland's Victory Means Britain's Defeat*, 23.
87. Lenin, "The War and Russian Social-democracy".
88. RCT, *Ireland's Victory Means Britain's Defeat*, 21–2.
89. See: Varon, *Bringing the War Home*.
90. In 1982, the RCT's Smash the Prevention of Terrorist Act Campaign wound up and was replaced by the Irish Freedom Movement. The IFM gained more traction than its predecessor and by the mid-1980s, the IFM was organising the only mass demonstrations around the issue of Irish Republicanism, besides the Troops Out Movement.
91. See: Bean and Hayes, "Sinn Fein and the New Republicanism in Ireland," 127–8.
92. "Pauline McLaughlin," *Troops Out* (December 1980), 7.
93. Darragh, *John Lennon's Dead*, 70.
94. *Hansard*, 9 December, 1980, col. 345w.
95. *Hansard*, 9 December, 1980, col. 346w.
96. *Morning Star*, 23 December 1980.
97. *Socialist Challenge*, 13 November 1980.
98. *Morning Star*, 12 December 1980.
99. *Morning Star*, 5 November 1980.

100. Rossiter, "'Not Our Cup of Tea'," 225.
101. Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 69.
102. Rossiter, "'Not Our Cup of Tea'," 69.
103. Ibid., 80–3.
104. Ibid., 136.
105. Sales, *Women Divided*, 3.
106. Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 7.
107. O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity*, 151; and Ashe, "The Virgin Mary Connection," 577.
108. Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," 70–1.
109. Sales, *Women Divided*, 186.
110. Corcoran, *Out of Order*, 143.
111. Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 7.
112. See: Rowbotham, Segal, and Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments*; Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*; and Bruley, "Jam Tomorrow?" 155–72.
113. For a discussion of the historiography, see: Thomlinson, "The Colour of Feminism," 453–55.
114. Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England*.
115. Rossiter, "'Not Our Cup of Tea'".
116. Ibid., 7.
117. Ibid., 102.
118. Ibid., 147.
119. Ibid., 149–59.
120. See: Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," 59–79; Aretxaga, "Dirty Protest," 123–48; Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*; O'Keefe, "Trading Aprons for Arms," 39–64; Rossiter, "'Not Our Cup of Tea'," 206–38; and O'Keefe, "Menstrual Blood as a Weapon of Resistance," 535–56.
121. Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," 65.
122. WAI, *Women Protest for Political Status in Armagh Gaol*, 1.
123. Rossiter, "'Not Our Cup of Tea'," 210.
124. See note 93 above.
125. Parkin, "Political Delegations of Women," 169.
126. See: Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 139–68; and Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1242–300.
127. "Irish Women's Days," *Spare Rib* (May 1981), 19. Italics in the original text.
128. "Irish Women's Days," 19.
129. "Irish Women Stand Up!" *Spare Rib* (December 1980), 9.
130. Boyd, "Why Political Status Matters," 10.
131. Boyd, "Talking with Bernadette McAliskey," 23.
132. "To the Women's Movement," *Spare Rib* (November 1981), 25.
133. McKearney, *The Provisional IRA*, 157–63.
134. Hayes, "Red Action," 242–3.
135. Shaw, "The Irish in Britain".

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